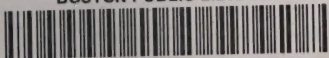


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LETTERS

OF AN

ENGLISH TRAVELLER

TO HIS

FRIEND IN ENGLAND,

ON THE

"REVIVALS OF RELIGION,"

IN AMERICA,

BOSTON,

BOWLES AND DEARBORN, 72, WASHINGTON STREET.

Press of Isaac R. Butts and Co.

1828.

B. H.
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DISTRICT OF MASSACHUSETTS, to wit:

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“LETTERS OF AN ENGLISH TRAVELLER TO HIS FRIEND IN ENGLAND, ON THE ‘REVIVALS OF RELIGION,’ IN AMERICA.”

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Massachusetts.

THE writer of these Letters, in consenting to their publication, offers his preface and apology in one word, when he says that he has been induced to believe, they might be of some service to the cause of religion in this country.

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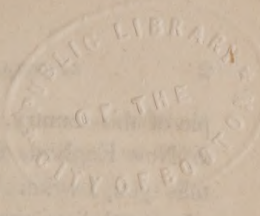
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LETTER I.

ON THE GENERAL CHARACTER OF REVIVALS.

_____, MAY 16th, 1827.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

YOU are curious to know something about the religion of this country ; a religion without an establishment ; a religion left to itself —without a priesthood I had almost said ; for every body preaches here who will ; nay, those who exhort and pray publicly among the laity, far outnumber those who *are considered* as regularly ordained. Well, in truth, if you have curiosity, prepare to have it satisfied, for I shall violate the old rhetorical rule, and plainly tell you that I am going to be interesting.

The most remarkable thing, about the peo-

ple of this country, is their religion : at least, in New England, from whence, as my date tells you, I write. Sects and creeds, doctrines and disquisitions, preachers and people, sermons and societies, plans and projects ; excitements and conversions, you may hear talked of wherever you go—in stage-coaches and steam-boats, in shops and bar-rooms, nay in ball-rooms and parties of pleasure, and in short, every where. But this religion is as remarkable in its character as it is in its colloquial exhibition ; and the most extraordinary thing in its character undoubtedly is the system of *revivals* of religion as they are called. For these are brought into a system and plan, as much as the religion itself—a system of operations as much as its theology is into a system of speculations.

But I see that I must task myself to give you some general notion of these things in the outset, for you have no idea, not even a generic one of what *Revivals of Religion* are.

Once, in two, three or five years, then, it is common for a township, a village, or some portion (i. e. some congregation or congregations) of a city, to be thrown into a great excitement about religion. The intervals are comparatively, and I am afraid, from what I can learn, actually seasons of great religious indifference. This seems in fact to be considered as a matter of course. It is often in conversation assumed as a fact, and stated as an apology. "We have had a great Revival here," many both of the clergy and the laity have said to me in answer to an inquiry into the state of religion among them—"we have had a great Revival here, and there is always a season of coldness afterwards." This is stated indeed with rather a mournful and self-accusing air, but still as a matter of course, and those who offer the apology seem to be glad that the case is no worse with them than with their neighbors. But to return; this periodical character of the Revivals, and the con-

stant succession of them, are circumstances that discriminate them from all other religious excitements that I have ever read or heard of. There have been excesses and ebullitions of zeal in the *origin* of all sects, of the Waldenses, the Anabaptists, the Quakers, the Puritans, the Presbyterians, &c. And the Methodists, whose unpretending walls are built out of "the polished stones" of some of our stately churches, are contriving through their class-meetings, and conferences, and love feasts, to keep up a sort of perpetual excitement. But the 'refreshings' here, come,—only less frequently—like the overflowings of the Nile. Not however from any less certain laws or causes, as I think I shall be able to show you.

But I must check my wanderings, and try to give you some further idea of what these Revivals are. No sooner does the first access of this spiritual influence appear, than the minister and the most zealous members of his church arouse themselves. They ap-

point meetings for prayer and exhortation to be held commonly as often as every evening in the week. Sometimes, the assemblings take place early in the morning. The very singularity of these arrangements arrests attention. People crowd to the meetings, at first, perhaps as much from curiosity as any other impulse. You would be apt to think, were you in some of the villages here, that the business of society is to "go to meeting," and the individuals most interested, do often in fact, give up all other business.—Some, even of the most thoughtless, and indeed it is most likely to be they, will in the ordinary course of things, come to be deeply impressed with what is passing around them. They are addressed by their preachers, with the most terrific warnings, or in the most mournful accents of pity and lamentation. Their christian friends perhaps take them by the hand, and, in new and unaccustomed tones, beseech them to flee from the wrath to come. The

slumbering conscience perhaps, is aroused to do its too much, and too long forgotten office. At any rate, the imagination and feelings are wrought upon. And through the influences, partly of real conviction and partly of overwrought passion, it is not strange that many should be thrown into the deepest distress. I have seen men in such an agony, as might easily be mistaken, in its apparent signs, for the remorse of a murderer or the anguish of a convict.—This does not, ordinarily, for it cannot, last long. From the very excess and violence of these emotions, there is at length developed a gentler feeling. And I have often suspected that this bare physical emotion has in many cases been mistaken for a real, spiritual change of views and sentiments. In many cases, too, even of this very brief experience, I have no doubt, there is a real, though I could scarcely admit, that it is a radical change. When men have long been taught, erroneously as I believe, that their whole nature is opposed to God and religion,

and have found, on having their minds fixedly bent to these great objects, that they really are capable of loving them, they have felt as if it was a new revelation to them. Their feelings, of course, pass through a very great change, which they not unnaturally liken to a "new creation." They probably take it indeed, for more than it is. It is not a renovation, but an era. They feel, and this is their language, that "old things have passed away, and that all things have become new," but it is not so much in the habits or even the dispositions of their minds, as in the new objects which have been brought distinctly and vividly before their minds.

These of course—whether their experience is merely physical, or whether it arises from a new attitude and posture of the mind—are the "Converts," and when this change has passed upon them, they become very important coadjutors in "the work." They go about warning and exhorting their former companions, describing their joys, avowing

their resolutions, and beseeching others to follow them. Those who have not attained to this change, and yet are seeking for it, are usually denominated "the anxious." So that the whole community is divided into the three classes of the converts, the anxious, and the unconcerned. And meetings are appointed for these different descriptions of persons. Indeed this distinction is made the ground of some very reprehensible causes of treatment towards them, which I shall mention when I go into detail.

This is perhaps enough in the general, and for the present. Yet I must tell you one thing more, before I lay down my pen ; and that is, what you may have already suspected, that I do not look upon these things altogether as you would have expected me to have done. In short, I must take the credit of being somewhat liberalized by travel. I find good men every where. I begin to think there is a mixture of good with evil, and evil with good, in every thing ; not even ex-

cepting our own Holy Church. These revivals—but I see that I must defer the topic of the good and the evil till another time.

Adieu, my dear friend,—may the best influences of the Best Religion ever be given to you and me, is the prayer of

Yours most affectionately,

* * * * *



LETTER II.

ON THE CAUSES OF REVIVALS.

_____, MAY 30th, 1827.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I SHALL pursue in this and some other letters, the subject of my last, referring you to H—for notices of my progress, “hair breadth escapes,” &c. The steam-boat incident, for these things are too common here to be called accidents, was indeed terrific.—But to leave “meaner themes,” I go at once to the promised subject.

In truth these Revivals are very extraordinary things : and I shall think it worth while to philosophize a little about them. That the body of the people should be thrown into a great periodical excitement, to which their ordinary sobriety must render them previously averse, that they should be thrown into such occasional commotions on a subject of permanent interest, which admits of no exigencies and chances like those of political strife ; once more, that they should be thrown into an excitement so dreadful and painful as this is, in the first stages of it, at least, and that all this should be done through the influence or through the countenance of one man,—I mean the clergyman,—all this is certainly very extraordinary. I say of the clergyman. For it is perfectly evident, that although various circumstances may conspire to produce this state of things, nothing could go on without him : without, that is to say, either his aid or concurrence. So true is this, that I have sometimes observed in a city, where the con-

gregations of course are completely intermixed in residence, society, and relationships, yet the Revivals will most exactly observe the bounds of clerical influence. Mr. A. "has a great Revival,"—for this is the very language they use—"in his congregation," and Mr. B.'s congregation—who dislikes these things,—is not touched. This is priestly power, indeed, and with a witness. They talk about our hierarchy, but in truth I never knew a people over whom the clergy had such an influence, among whom such a towering *spiritual* hierarchy was built up, as the good and intelligent, but after all very superstitious people of New England. In our Church there is nothing like it. Our clergy, you know, treat us a good deal as other gentlemen of influence and respectability would. The ministers of New England are—gentlemen, some of them, and a good many are not—but at any rate, they are almost all of them *rulers*. It puts me in mind of an anecdote that is related of a clergyman by the name of Rogers, the fifth de-

scendant, by the by, from the martyr—whose sufferings, by the by again, are set forth in a most lugubrious print of himself and his family in all the old Westminster Catechisms in the country. The family seems to have flourished here; the fourth lineal descendant, I find, having been a President of Harvard University. It is a curious fact, also, that the oldest son in every instance up to the eleventh generation has been a clergyman.—But to the anecdote, which to be sure, does not deserve so formal an introduction, though it shows that the spirit of the family was not extinguished in the fires of Smithfield. A traveller, passing the house of our fifth descendant, in a retired country parish, and seeing him employed in his garden called out, “do you serve here?” The old gentleman, says our anecdote, stretched himself up to his height of more than six feet, and replied, “I *rule* here.” The clergy still rule, though less ostentatiously than in former days. But I am straying from the point.

A Revival usually commences with the

direct and systematic exertion of the pastor. And to begin with the beginning, the first inquiry would be, what begins it with him? And here it is that I shall philosophize a little. I think there is something extravagant and unnatural in his own religion that brings him into this state of mind. Just so far as religion or any other principle fails to be rational, although there may be a great deal of impulse and zeal about it, it wants reality and heartiness. Just in that proportion, do cant, and the holy tone, and the sanctimonious countenance and demeanor take the place of an interior and quickened interest. Just so far does religion, however much it may have to do with the passions, fail to incorporate itself with the mind, and to make a part of it. A mind in this state, for human nature is so far true to itself, must be restless and conscience-stricken. Add to this, the supposition, that a man's notion of religion is extravagant, that he is thinking of some unreasonable and unattainable state of feeling as constituting religion,

and you will see that all this working together in his mind must, in process of time, produce an effervescence. Dissatisfied with his official duties which are incessantly bringing him into contact with religion, growing more and more mechanical, the more he has to do with the subject, he feels, and there is a particular reason in his office why he should *first* feel, and there is a reason in the nature of things why he should *periodically* feel, the urgent necessity of some grand arousing from his lethargy. He wants an excitement—a paroxysm—any thing but what he has. The maximum of his religion is not the vigor of moral health, but a fever; and his moral constitution is brought into a kind of necessity of having this fever once in a few months—or a few years as the case may be.

We must add to this that the doctrines he embraces, partaking of the same extravagance that characterizes his general views of religion, lead him to the same results. He believes that all men are naturally and utterly

depraved and wicked, and deserving of unspeakable and endless misery,—that the character which they bring from their very birth, which they derive from their creation, dooms them to eternal and infinite sufferings. As he walks abroad among the people, as he looks around upon the living and happy multitude, he exclaims, no doubt with unfeigned pity, “these multitudes, gay and joyous as they are, are children of perdition ; they are going to hell ; they hang by the brittle thread of life over the burning and bottomless abyss—another day, another moment, and where may they be?....There is a change,” says he,—for he is not thinking in this exigency of the long course and habit of virtue, and devotion—“there is a *change*, he says, which will save them. They cannot produce it themselves, but it must be wrought in them by the special grace of God. In one moment, the power of God could make all these reprobate creatures the heirs of heaven. They are all unconscious of the horrible catastrophe that awaits

them, and of themselves unable to escape it—they are as dry bones, as dead men in the valley of vision, and they are soon to awake to everlasting burnings !”..... It is thus, that receiving the figurative representations of scripture as literal, and forgetting those qualifications of its language which the reasonable interpreter must make,—he conjures up his fearful system of faith—fearful enough indeed, if it were really and universally believed, not only to plunge the world into an unheard of excitement, but to drive the whole world to absolute madness.

Such, I suppose, is the process by which the Revival commences in the mind of the Minister ; and thence its progress among the people is not difficult to account for.

He first applies himself of course to the church, *i. e.* to the body of communicants. He appoints special meetings of this body, meetings for prayer, days of fasting, &c. He tells them that it mainly depends on them whether there shall be a Revival. He preach-

es to them, often to the neglect of the congregation. In an excursion which I made last week, I spent Sunday at a small village in the interior, and attended church all day. Both sermons I observed were addressed to the church members, or at least related exclusively to their duties. I expressed my surprise to mine host at evening, and he said the same thing had been going on for several months, "and you would think, said he, that the church members were the worst people among us." I asked him of how many the church might consist, thinking I might find some apology for this course in their numbers. He replied that there were less than fifty, and the congregation I perceived was large, consisting, I should say, of five or six hundred. By being thus singled out, and by the manner in which it is urged, and intreated, and warned, the church is at length aroused, and prepared to act on the body of the congregation. And when several neighboring churches are excited in this manner, the way is prepared

for a more extended system of exertions. The clergy induce the churches to appoint delegates, who, with themselves, visit the several townships in succession, hold meetings, keep fasts, and sometimes visit the people from house to house. You will easily see how much calculated this last procedure is to strike an awe upon the people. Indeed, this system of domiciliary visitation is one of the most censurable things in the whole plan, and I shall take some other time to give you a further account of it.

To these causes which are general and may be relied on, some are to be added which are accidental. There are two or three Itinerant Preachers in this country who had a talent and acquired a reputation for producing these excitements, and, now, from having this reputation, are almost sure to produce them wherever they go. The people among whom they come would account themselves guilty of the most awful obduracy, and ready to be forsaken of heaven, if they should refuse to be

aroused. The very fear of not being excited, excites them. This would seem to be the influence that attends these men, for I do not hear, that they have any pretensions to the powers of Whitfield, or even of Jonathan Edwards, the reasoner ;—and whose moral argument, too, according to tradition, was at times one of the most commanding power. Sometimes, these itinerant preachers find strong competitors for the honor of producing Revivals, in the feeble sex. I have heard lately of two or three instances, where converts of this description have thrown a population of several hundreds into the deepest agitation. One young female, (of whom I had had particular information,) only fourteen years old, having been converted, went out to exhort her neighbors, and eventually was carried over the whole township, from house to house, instructing, admonishing, and even praying. Indeed, my informant said, much as if he had been speaking of the competitors on the race-

course, that, "there was not a *man* in the town that could pray with her."

Advantage is sometimes taken of the extraordinary events of Providence, to produce an excitement. A sudden death, or the death of a young person, is often employed for this purpose. The whole process of the sickness, death, and burial, I have known to be converted to this use, with the most remorseless disregard of all the claims of relationship and private grief. A young and tender female, thrown into a violent sickness, half distracted with pain, or more than half delirious, will be visited by successive clouds of dark browed faces, which she scarcely recognises as acquaintances, and will be warned and prayed with, till she is brought into the most horrible state of fear and agitation, and till in fact, she is hastened out of the world, by the very means that are professedly, and, no doubt, designedly used, to save her soul. From the moment she has departed,—at the funeral and for weeks after—her awful example is held up ;

the expressions of her horror and despair are publicly repeated ; and it is said perhaps in the very presence of her parents and friends, that she has gone to the other world an unconverted soul,—and perhaps even the horrible inference is not withholden ! You will readily believe that people who will bear this, are prepared to be wrought upon in almost any manner, and to almost any degree. I ought in justice to say that I think the larger portion of the community here, would not bear it. I trust, for the honor of human nature, that such scenes are not frequent.

I ought not to close this letter, in which I may seem to you to have reflected somewhat severely on the clergy, without professing my entire conviction of their good intentions. I have not a doubt of their sincerity, and desire to promote what they conceive to be true religion. Indeed, it is difficult to question the *sincerity* of any class or sect of religionists. There is still room however for the suspicion of some wrong motives, among the promo-

ters of Revivals;—and for the entrance of doubts, *about the wisdom of their proceedings*, the door is wide open. Thus with regard to the motives, there may mingle with general sincerity, such personal considerations as the eclat which a great Revival gives to the pastor under whose ministry it takes place, the increased favor which he has with his brethren, the influence he gains among the churches, &c. As to the wisdom of these things, I shall have something to say hereafter.

For the present I release you, by subscribing myself,

Most affectionately, your friend,

* * * * *

LETTER III.

CAUSES OF REVIVALS, CONTINUED.

—————, JUNE 2d, 1827.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I HAVE not quite satisfied myself, as yet, in what I have said of the *causes* of the great religious excitements here. And though I sent off a letter but three days ago, I resume this subject while it is fresh in my mind.

Much, undoubtedly, is to be referred to the deep interest which all men must take,—which human nature is fitted to take, in such a subject as religion. I wonder, sometimes, that the religious guides, while urging their doctrine of total depravity, and representing human nature as utterly devoid of all religious feeling, do not suspect that the effects they produce are a refutation of their theory. Let them try their power on “the unreasoning tribes,” or let them suppose the beings whom they address to be *all* reason, purely

such, without any moral emotion or susceptibility, and see, if they could produce or expect any such results. They say, that it is the power of God, that gives efficacy to their preaching, and so do I say, but it is the power of God operating through the very constitution of human nature. The human heart is *made* to feel a solemn interest in its moral welfare and danger, and especially in these subjects, as they extend themselves to the unknown and dark futurity.

In this view, I confess, that all the extravagances of pious zeal in the whole history of religion, seem to me interesting. I am not disgusted or amused as I once was, with the excesses and enormities of superstition. I can receive a lesson of wisdom, even from Simeon the Stylite, as he stands upon the pillar which his folly erected. The poor Hindoo, suspended from a tree, to be withered and shrivelled by the rays of a tropical sun, teaches a most affecting truth. The same truth does the wild Indian proclaim, when he causes

the tragedy of Jephtha's daughter to be acted over in order to appease his wrathful deities. What a powerful principle—for this is the lesson and the truth—what a powerful principle must that be which can command such sacrifices!—which overlooks all the ordinary and obvious calculations of selfishness, and lives upon pain and torture—which feeds the fires of martyrdom instead of being extinguished by them, and instead of being quenched in blood, is still opening its fountains anew in the veins of ten thousand victims! Would nothing suffice, upon the altar of religious sacrifice, but the very sinews, and hearts' blood, and all the tenderest affections of the heart—nothing but suffering of body and anguish of mind! So mankind have thought at least, and though they have thought erroneously, they have by the same means, fully shown how strong as well as misguided, the principle of religion has been within them.

It is nothing new or surprising, therefore, that this principle should be productive of

very extraordinary effects. Such unquestionably are those witnessed in Revivals of religion. There is a deep, though often suppressed concern, in most minds, about duty and conscience, about heaven and hell, and the favor of God : there ought to be. It is too often dormant, indeed, but it only wants the call of circumstances to arouse it. Such a call is made in Revivals of religion. And, regarding the whole matter in this light, I confess that I feel a deep interest and even sympathy in the state of the public mind in such seasons. I know that these plodders in the fields, these toilers in the workshop, these drudges in the humbler callings of life, as the mere worldly man will regard them, have each of them a soul ; and I know, that oftentimes, beneath the pressure of their burdens and the cloud of their cares, they deeply feel it. And I sympathize with one of these men, when, from the plough or the work-bench, or from some humbler task he comes up to the crowded meeting, and says, “ what shall I do to be

saved?" I might wish that he were more wisely guided, but that is not so much his own fault, as the fault of his teachers. It is a pity, indeed, that he could not be recommended to solitude, reading, prayer, and communion with his own heart, that he could not be directed to seek religion in a more simple, calm, and natural way, that he could not be led to see it, as a more purely spiritual thing, as existing more in habits of feeling and conduct, and less in temporary frames and sudden experiences; but, nevertheless, in his frames and experiences, in his fears and agonies, in his very mistakes and errors, I see the breaking forth of his higher nature, as lightning from the dark cloud. I look upon it with less pleasure, indeed, than upon the calm and tempered sunshine, but still I look upon this irresistible power of the religious nature in man, with respect and awe.

I do not know but this propensity to religious excitement is sometimes made, in Revivals, a subject of deliberate calculation for

selfish purposes. I suppose it is. I have conversed with intelligent men here, who are inclined, I thought uncharitably, to refer much to this as a cause. I am afraid, however, it cannot be denied that, in some instances, clergymen have deliberately and coolly resorted to a Revival, and set all their energies and devices at work to produce it, in order to save a sinking reputation, or a failing parish. For all this, I do none the less respect the feeling that exists among the people, who of course, know nothing of the unworthy designs or motives of their pastor.

Indeed, my friend, it cannot be concealed, and every thing that I see and all my reflections convince me of it more and more, that most of the evils of a religious nature, in this country, and our own, and in every other, are owing to the clergy! To them is chiefly owing the *odium theologicum*, that has existed in all ages—to them the slavish dread of inquiry and innovation, to them the variance, strife, and uncharitableness that prevail among

the people—to them, the extravagance of these religious excitements. Let the clergy who are their promoters, unite together in recommending moderation among the people, let them appoint but one extra meeting in the week,* let them take up a more calm, gentle, and rational method of teaching, and no one can doubt that the character of their revivals would be very materially changed. A clergyman in the city of ——, gave me an account of a revival in his parish, in which the passions, and especially the baser passions, such as fear, were scarcely addressed at all. “The leading impression, he said, on every mind, was regret for past forgetfulness of God and past ingratitude towards him.” Now this, I am ready to say, was extremely interesting and delightful. I am sure, that I never yet knew the community that had not

* It is a fact that the Faculty of Professors in the Andover Institution advised their pupils to hold in a time of religious excitement but one extra meeting in the week. We gladly state it, as greatly to their honor.
—*Amer. Ed.*

cause to be deeply affected by such a conviction. But, observe, the clergyman in this case, was a man, though of an earnest, yet of an extremely rational and wide-reaching mind.

I said, I was ready to pronounce altogether in favor of such a Revival as this. But, in truth I should be obliged to pause upon such an admission. To say nothing of the general effects of these excitements, I cannot help suspecting from what I have seen of them, that there is fanaticism always, and necessarily, at the bottom of them ; that they are based upon false ideas, and upon this, in particular, the root of all fanaticism, that they are the *special* work of God, the fruit of his supernatural interposition. Let these things be looked upon as the natural results of human feeling, let the idea of any thing extraordinary and preternatural be taken away, and I suspect that three quarters of that which supports them in the public mind would be taken away also. "It is the work of God," is the

declaration that carries awe and contagious fear over the minds of the body of the people. This represses inquiry, silences doubt, spreads anxiety and apprehension, among the timid, and emboldens the confidence of the forward and presumptuous.

This impression of something supernatural, is very obvious and striking, at times, in case of the conversion of an individual, especially if the individual be *noted* from any cause, and the event takes place in a time of general indifference. It is curious to witness the feeling that is often awakened by such a circumstance. The poor people of the Sandwich Islands could scarcely look with more of mingled awe and exultation on the rising flame from the volcano in the valley of Kirauea. It is indeed, among these people, oftentimes, the rising and volcanic flame of a great religious excitement. But it is of the impression of the simple fact that I was speaking, and this is, indeed, of the most singular kind. It is often a prominent topic of public conversation,

prayers and sermons for weeks together. The people talk of it with awe and rapture in their countenances, according as fear or triumph predominate in their minds; the whole neighborhood feels as if the power of God had appeared in the midst of it; the *Masters of Revivals* wear a face of solemn importance, as if some great thing had happened. The extraordinary convert is brought forward and showed off, if he will permit himself to be so treated, or, it may be, that he shows himself off, by going into the assembly of the people, and proclaiming that he, who was yesterday a totally depraved sinner, is to day a favored child of God, and a happy heir of heaven. And what is the great thing that has happened? Why, at the utmost, that this man is convinced of his sins and is resolved to amend,—he has been a bad man, and he means to be a good man. A very interesting purpose, certainly, but furnishing no reason for so extraordinary a sensation. Men often make resolutions to be better, but they

do not think it necessary to proclaim them, nor others, to take such notice of them. This extraordinary sensation, therefore very plainly discloses the deep-rooted notion that prevails among the people, of something supernatural in these conversions.

In fact, this very notion, as well as any thing else, may be considered as one of the efficient causes of a spreading religious excitement. The solicitude which is often exhibited to maintain this point, shows of what importance it is, in meeting all those objections and misgivings, that would naturally arise with regard to the extraordinary and extravagant proceedings which are adopted in such cases. It is common to represent the matter as if some silent and mysterious influence had been, for a considerable time, descending upon the minds of the people, and, at last, as if this influence came almost visibly down like the overshadowing of a cloud.

I would not have you suppose, my dear friend, that I reject or go any way towards

rejecting the doctrine of a divine influence on the mind. For I perceive from your last, that you are leaning to very serious views of this subject. And such also are my own. I have not a doubt that the Father of Spirits may, and does influence the minds of his creatures. It would be monstrous, it seems to me, while we admit his instant power to be manifest in all other created things, to exclude it from those beings who most need its control and guidance. Nay, I am a firm believer in the doctrine of immediate interpositions, in behalf of the exposed, the tempted, and distressed. I know not on what else to found the propriety of prayer—of prayer, at least, considered, in its original, and primary sense, as a petition. But certainly we must take care in our theory to limit these interpositions, somewhere. For if they are the rule, and not the exception, the law and not the proviso, they are no longer interpositions. Without doubt, the whole course of religious experience is to be traced to God as in some

sense its author and director ; but not surely to successive interpositions of the Supreme Being. These we must believe are reserved for peculiar emergencies.

But the general condition of a sinful being is not such an emergency, because it is general. The conversion from that state, may be ascribed, indeed, to God's teaching, guidance, grace and spirit, but not to any miraculous interposition. Otherwise it would cease to be miraculous, since a miracle, an interposition implies a departure from the fixed and regular course of things. If it is enough to constitute any thing a miracle that it is the work of God, the product of divine power, then all the events that have taken place in the universe are but a series of miracles, the conversion of a sinner, then, is not a miracle : nor is the conversion of hundreds any more so.*

* The writer does not seem to be aware, that the advocates of Revivals reject the *word*, miraculous, as descriptive of that divine influence which produces them. We let the passage stand, however, since the

But I go a step further. *The grace of God, however truly communicated to human experience, is modified by human experience.* This is unavoidable. No one will undertake to say that every good thought or affection which springs up in the human breast, is pure as the Divinity that inspired it. Religion, we say, is the gift of God. But whose religion is perfect? Whose religion is not modified by his taste and temperament, and by the state of society around him?

You see the point to which I would arrive. If these alleged conversions were miracles, we should have nothing to do but admire them. If they are not, then, like all other

thing is the same, and would naturally be so expressed, by an intelligent stranger, not acquainted with the expedients, at evasion, which are constantly used in our controversies. An influence is contended for, which is *beyond nature*, or in other words, as the writer very well expresses it, in another part of these letters, it is contended "that effects are produced which cannot be accounted for by any known laws of the human mind." This is the very definition of miracle.—*Amer. Ed.*

facts, are they submitted to our scrutiny. Suppose, that they are real conversions : some of them doubtless are. But suppose, for the sake of the argument, that they *all* are. Still it would not follow, that they are altogether to be approved. It would not follow that they take place under the most favorable circumstances, or that they are of the most desirable character. Men become converted, or in other words, they become good and pious, through various extraneous influences,—various modes of preaching, various representations of truth, various religious institutions and social aids—but does it follow that all these influences are equally good ? It pleases God to accommodate his power and grace to human weakness and extravagance, but does it follow that weakness and extravagance are as good things as wisdom and moderation ?

The mistake seems to be here. It seems to be imagined that a divine influence on any mind, affords a sanction for the human means

which have been devised for it,—for the human process through which that mind has passed. The reasoning is this. “I have become a good man. I could not have become such, but through the grace of God. The grace of God would approve of nothing but what is perfectly right; but what, in other words, is morally best. Therefore the means and the method by which I have become a good man, are the best. And therefore,” adds the self-complacent fanatic, “it is a sin, it is a grievous impiety, it is the sign of a wicked and irreligious mind, to oppose this method.”

But surely fanatic was never more blind. Do not men become pious, through all possible processes—of sudden excitement and gradual reflection, of fear and hope, of ignorant instruction and wise instruction, of teachings from the word and teachings from providence, of Methodist class-meetings, and Episcopal ordinances, of noisy conventicles, and the silent meetings of the Quakers? And do

they not all become Christians through divine aid? But shall each one, therefore, assume his own experience to be the only gospel standard? Shall he proscribe all who differ from him, all who prefer a different experience, as opposers of the work of God?

Revivals of religion then, in common with all other religious experience, are subjected to our examination: they are not to escape under the broad character of being works of God. To pretend that all doubt or distrust of them is a sin, you will easily see, is either gross fanaticism, or grosser imposition.

“But,” I can conceive that some of their advocates may say—“though there is nothing miraculous in the experience of individuals, is there not something, in fact, amounting to a miracle, in the *general occurrence* of these events? Is not the simultaneousness and strength of these impressions in so many different minds—is it not even miraculous?” Should you not say that he who could ask this question, knows not much of the history—

of religion in past ages—knows not much of the human mind, of the power of sympathy, of the contagious and combustible nature of human passions—nay, knows not much of that solemn religious nature, through which God is ever testifying his power, even in the excesses of folly and weakness, fanaticism and superstition?

Besides, if we admit the idea of miraculous interposition, in these cases, where shall we stop? The Anabaptists, the Quakers who were scarcely less extravagant at the outset, the Methodists who, in their origin, followed hard after the Quakers, the early Puritans, though employing the sword of Cromwell, would claim from us the same assent. Nay more, the extravagances of every particular Revival, against which, I find, that some of the more moderate feel obliged to protest, must nevertheless be entitled to shelter themselves under the same broad sanction. And, after all, what is the sanction? Why, this in truth, and nothing else—the *opinion* of some

men, fallible and erring as ourselves, and they too, deeply implicated, that these Revivals are the special and miraculous works of God : *the opinion* of parties in their own cause. I say *miraculous*, for unless these things are actually miraculous, there is nothing in them, I repeat, that can demand an implicit approbation. Unless there be such a sanction, we are commanded, indeed, to “try the spirits, whether they be of God.” The apostles were too modest to exempt, from such a judgment, the effects of their own inspired teaching and miraculous dispensation. For “petty men,” in the comparison, to rise up in these days, and to fulminate anathemas against all who distrust the effects of *their* zeal, if it were not ridiculous, would be monstrous !

I have given you a homily, instead of an epistle : but I sat down, this time, not to report but to reason.

The next time I will report, and give you some account of the methods by which this

extraordinary system of Revivals is kept up. In the mean time, and at all times, I am most truly,

Yours,

* * * * *

LETTER IV.

METHODS OF PROMOTING THE REVIVALS.

_____, JUNE 11th, 1827.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I HAVE just returned from attending two evening meetings—two in one evening!—what will our good Bishop say? Let him read the letter, if you think it worth his notice, and he will see that I have been safely, if not usefully employed.

I thought these meetings so characteristic of two religious sects here, and of the methods by which the Revivals are promoted, that I determined while attending, to give you some account of them. The first was in a

church of the Orthodox, or Calvinistic Congregationalists, the second, of the Arminian Methodists. The Methodist, especially of this particular class, is all gentleness and pity. He "woos the soul to heaven." He works upon the passions. The medium through which he operates, is social sympathy. The preacher of the other class carries a sterner face; and instead of offering the bosom of sympathy, and inviting the poor troubled sinner to lean upon it, he presents a sword to the sinner's own bosom; and his language is, "I must probe this festering wound to the quick; I must cut off this fatal gangrene." A sinner with these people, you must know, to know the whole enormity of this treatment, is one who has not passed through this moral paroxysm, this revival process, (either by himself or in company with others,) and who, according to their representation, cannot pass through it by any efforts of his own. Such an assembly of sinners, I suppose, was gathered this evening

at the first place of worship where I attended. So, at least, the preacher seemed to consider the most of them. He first told them their duty, which consisted in some mysterious and unintelligible coming to Christ. Then he averred that they could do it if they would. The third point, was in the words of the text, "but ye will not come to me." This indisposition he stated, they had derived from their birth. It was a part of their nature, and therefore amounted to an inability; yet, an inability, he said, of the most dreadful kind, because it was altogether their own fault. You will observe, he had just said, that it was derived from *their birth*; entailed upon them from Adam, before they had a being. The fourth step in the process of reasoning was to cast them on the sovereign grace of God. This grace, he stated, God had before determined, by an irreversible decree to bestow upon whom he would. There, with many terrific warnings against the reluctant and rebellious, he left it. I was glad, for

consistency's sake, that he did not close with an Arminian exhortation. He ended with lamentations, which, if they had not been so outrageously unreasonable, would really have been pathetic. He said he could only weep over them and pity them. He could only breathe forth the voice of instruction and prayer in their behalf, as Ezekiel did over the valley of dry bones; and God only knew who of them, or whether any of them, would be raised from their death in trespasses and sins.

The metaphysical part of this discourse, which was four fifths of it, was a piece of as chilling ratiocination as I ever heard from the mathematical chair at Oxford. The preacher displayed his metaphysical apparatus, he drew forth his sharpest instruments, and, though he was cutting the heart-strings of the people, or thought he was, he did it as mechanically and coldly as ever did surgical operator. He seemed to think the human heart was to be approached by a regular system of tactics.

Every thing with him, indeed, was a matter of system. He gloried in Calvinism as the only plan of doctrine by which sinners could be driven to conviction and utter despair of themselves. I thought I could almost discern a smile of triumph in his countenance, as he drew the lines, and set up the fences of this narrow and gloomy theology, which turns the earth into one vast field of slaughter. This sort of preaching is sometimes significantly called, "penning up sinners," and when thus penned up, and restive and angry at their situation, many consider them as in a most hopeful nearness to the kingdom of heaven. And indeed many persons are made to think that the reasonable anger they feel at such treatment, the moral horror with which such doctrines strike them are the workings of a depraved nature, "the opposition," as they are taught to call it, "of the natural heart."

But it is time that I turn to a more inviting scene; more inviting at least, if not more wisely ordered. The Methodist Chapel was

hard by, and though it was 9 o'clock, when I left this dismal preacher, and his dejected congregation, yet, as I was abroad on a tour of observation, I determined to go in. It happened fortunately to be at the very moment when a second service, designed more particularly for the benefit of troubled and anxious persons, was commencing. As I entered, I observed at the farther end of the chapel,—in an enclosure, about which was a slight railing very much like that which surrounds the altars in *our* churches—a person with his hands crossed and partly folded in each other, and with an air of pious abstraction in his whole demeanor, walking back and forwards, and singing. He had a rather youthful but still pale countenance, with just enough of sallowness to give it a pensive expression, and all this added effect to a very sweet and soothing strain of music. It was in the solemn measure of a chaunt, or recitative, and the sentiment agreed well with the tone of it, being an invitation to the sinful, the sorrowful and heavy

laden, "to come to Jesus." This is the burden of many of their sacred songs, of whose power, you can scarcely have any idea, without hearing them. Their effect on those whose taste is not at all offended by them, must be immense, and doubtless often is overwhelming.

The music soon ceased, and the Minister of the congregation came forward, and in very gentle and affectionate tones, invited all who were anxious for their salvation to approach the altar, that they might receive his counsel and the prayers of their christian friends. About thirty, as I judged, went out from the mass of the congregation, and kneeled down around the altar. The minister then spoke to them of their situation and feelings, in a manner that was really paternal. There was no harshness in his language, and he used no denunciation. He spoke with as much tenderness and sympathy as if he had been addressing persons in great affliction, or as if he had been by the bedside of the sick and suffering. Indeed, I could not help feeling, as

if some of the strict claims and discriminations of conscience had yielded, very pardonably perhaps, to the gushing tide of pity and sympathy.

When the exhortation was over, he invited them to join in prayer. There were several persons around the minister, and within the altar, who kneeled down together, and some of them as their feelings prompted, prayed in succession. The manner and spirit of their prayers was really touching. The tone, contrary to what I expected in a Methodist chapel, was generally mild, and even when it arose to vociferation, it appeared to be the vociferation of affectionate and earnest entreaty. The persons prayed for, were denominated by all the most kind and affectionate appellations. They were "poor souls"—and "dear souls"—and "mourning souls"—and the burden of every prayer was that they might be "made happy." What struck me particularly was the social character of this service, especially compared with the barren ceremonial of the Congregational churches.

There was no formality, no praying by rule or appointment. It was a series of prayers, or rather *one* continued intercession, and each one who led the devotions of the others, seemed to do so from the immediate promptings of his feelings. Others, at the same time, accompanied the most interesting petitions, with exclamations of "Amen," or "God grant it," or "we beseech thee." It seemed as if there was a social and common feeling in these supplications, such as perhaps no insulated prayer of one individual could ever express. Every now and then, in the brief intervals of this service, the sweet singer, whom I before mentioned, lifted up his voice, commonly singing one or two stanzas, such as occurred to him at the moment, and admirably adapting his selections to what had been uttered in prayer or exhortation. In fine, though a more splendid ceremonial might more impress a people accustomed to such things, yet for the plain and sober people of New England, especially of the lower classes,

it seems to me that the Jesuits themselves could not have devised any thing better adapted to captivate and carry away the mind, than this simple service of the Methodist Chapel. And yet it was quite evident that nothing could be farther from art.

I must wait for a brighter hour to finish this letter—and in the mean time, I send my nightly wish and blessing to you across the wide waters that separate us.

You see, my friend, in what I but poorly narrated to you last evening, some of the methods by which these Revivals are promoted. The idea prevails here, as I have probably more than once implied before, that they are altogether supernatural, and yet nothing ever more showed the working of human passions, and I might add of human contrivance. Imagination, sympathy, fear, and hope are all powerfully addressed. I have

seen an assembly, and that too collected in a place where the very wisest instruction might have been expected—an assembly of youth; among whom at their first coming together, there were tears and sobbings all over the house—I have seen them addressed during the whole evening with nothing but the most terrific representations of their state,—which was compared sometimes to that of persons, benighted in a pathless forest, surrounded by howling wild beasts, and by pitfalls and precipices ready to receive them at every step,—and, then again, to that of unhappy wretches cast upon a desolate shore, with the roaring sea ready to ingulph them:—and when I saw and heard all this, it seemed to me astonishing that any sane man could call this the especial work of God. If there ever was a work of man, I thought with myself, it is this.

I have intimated, that there is contrivance in these things. I do not mean trick or cunning, but it is quite evident that the promoters of these Revivals are not altogether willing to

leave them to that divine power, of which they so confidently boast. Or, in other words, they act on the principle that man is to "work together with God," though they are anxious to deny the obvious inference. Circumstances that may affect the public mind, are never lost sight of. In the first place, these excitements commonly prevail in the winter, which is the season of leisure. I do not say that they deliberately fix upon this season for their operations; but the fact is worthy of note, and might fairly lead them to hesitate about referring all to that divine power, whose accesses they would scarcely dare to measure, by the declination of the sun.* Then, in the next place, every thing

* The committee of the Oneida Presbytery state it as a "fact, worthy of notice, that revivals prevail almost invariably in a *general time of health*." The fact is indeed worthy of notice, and warrants the same inference as that stated in the letter. Nay, would it be presumptuous to conclude, since sickness and afflictions do humble the heart, and were designed for this end, that there is really more religion among the people in a time of sickness, than in a time of health? But the committee say the reverse is most likely to be true.—*Amer. Ed.*

that would divert the public mind from religious concerns, is particularly and carefully guarded against. A series of musical entertainments though ever so innocent, a debating society of young men, though in ordinary circumstances a very good thing, a Mechanic's Association, though *almost* one of the best things in the world, would meet the pointed disapprobation of the pastor and his zealous friends, in any township or village, where a Revival is commencing.

Means of a much more exceptionable character, are often resorted to. When a number of converts are made, it is common to appoint in the same house, one meeting for the converts, and another for "the anxious." They assemble at the same hour in different apartments. The very circumstance of such a separation among friends and associates, is, of course, very impressive, and upon the one part, it is always made a means of terrible effect. Nay, I have been told of a case where a clergyman, who holds the highest rank, among his brethren, and is most of all

distinguished in these matters, who proceeded in this manner, or, a worse, in a Boarding School of young ladies. If there is any case in the world, where the utmost discretion and gentleness should be used, it would surely be that of young ladies from twelve to sixteen years of age, separated from their parents, and with feelings, on every subject in the highest degree, susceptible and tender ;—and yet, these young and timid females were assembled in the school room, there separated and placed on different seats according to their presumed character of converts, or anxious, or unconcerned, and then addressed with language imagined to be suited to their several conditions. Comparisons were made ; the anxious were pointed to the happy converts, who of course would feel flattered by so enviable a distinction ; the careless, or those presumed to be so, were pointed to the anxious ; congratulations, warnings, and denunciations were scattered about with an effect as terrible as if they had been “fire-

brands, arrows, and death ;” there were tears, and sighs, and groans, enough to break the hearts of these young creatures ; and the whole school, as you would suppose, was convulsed with raptures, and fears, and agonies. And yet I believe the clergyman gained credit, and I could never hear that the school lost any.

I have before spoken of what I think deserves to be branded with a name, and therefore I shall call it again, *domiciliary visitation*. You have only to know what this is, to be satisfied of the effect it must produce. Two or three men, strangers often, some or all of them, enter a house with an air of preternatural solemnity, and signify their wish to see the family together. As the male members of it are commonly absent on their business, they have to deal only with the females of the family. These, with their natural timidity and reserve, sit down in fear and silence, to await the dread communication. Their inquisitors open with the most pointed questions,

put in the most awful manner, concerning their most secret, solemn, and delicate feelings, and if they find them stupid, as they are very likely indeed to be stupified with such treatment, these men of the "Holy Office" close with tremendous warnings, and more tremendous prayers. I have heard even intelligent females declare, that they never met with any thing, so *horrifying*, to use a word of our lamented friend, Morris Birkbeck's, as one of these visitations. And yet to resist one of them would mark out the family that did it, with the most signal reprobation.

I am afraid I must add, that sectarianism contributes to feed the fire of these excitements. Every sect, of course, expects to be built up by them. But more especially do all turn their indignation against those more liberal and judicious sects that stand aloof from the "great work." These are chiefly the Unitarians and Episcopalians. The prevailing horror, now, I find, is of the Unitarians. This sect is spreading so rapidly, that the

whole extended system of Revivals is arrayed against them in particular, and is expected soon to work their utter downfall. It seems to me, I must say, whatever I might wish, a very hasty and ill-judged expectation. I have talked with many persons of this class, and whatever may be their errors, I think I never met with persons more firmly convinced they were right. I am certain, it must be something more than a great stir or a great passion that will convert them. And yet I find that their opponents, the Orthodox, all believe, that there is some deep and secret misgiving in their minds, and imagine that, at the first blast of the trumpet of Revivals, the walls of this spiritual Jericho will fall down. Let this be as it may, and however it may turn out, it is certainly a very bad aspect of this zeal, that it should take the character of proselytism. I have heard that many families of Unitarian congregations have been visited, and urged to leave their teacher, and come over to the other side. Certainly, nothing can excuse

this. The world has seen enough of the danger of enlisting the bad passions in religion; but here seems to be a settled and deliberate scheme for doing it.

One thing more I must mention which has a great effect. A day of Revivals is a day of rumors. Stories are perpetually told, of marvellous conversions, and awful shakings in this place and that place, of dreams and visions and sights. Indeed, I know of nothing that appears to depend more on human favor, than this same work that is alleged to be so divine. Governor Such-an-one, says this, and General Somebody-else, says that, in favor of Revivals, and therefore, they must be good things. Then again, the errors of opposing sects are giving way, and it is rumored all over the land, that the Deacon of such a heretical Minister has left him, or that the Minister himself has abjured his errors, and acknowledged that the power of God is with his opponents. Perhaps, the scene of his confession is laid on his death bed, and

the solemnities of dissolution lend awe to the impression.

But I am tired of telling you these things, as I am of hearing rumors even, and therefore I bid you at once, an affectionate

Adieu.

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LETTER V.

ON THE RELIGION OF REVIVALS.

_____, AUGUST 10th, 1827.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

IN my previous letters to you, as far as I can remember their multifarious topics, I have treated of the character and causes of these phenomena, called Revivals, and of the means by which they are wrought into a system of religious influence. But the great subject of all, is still behind. The great question is—though indeed they take it for granted in the very name which they give to these popular

excitements—the great question is, *are they really “revivals of religion?”* Or in other words, what is the religion of these revivals? After all, it must come to this—it must, with the judicious and reasonable *among themselves*. Every thing in religion, must be compared with the scriptural standard, must abide the test of reason, and good sense, and real expediency. Of measures, as well as men, it is true, that “by their fruits shall ye know them.” It is not enough to say, that there is a great deal of feeling for a time,—no, nor a great deal of *good* feeling, if there is more bad than good, or if the impression, whatever it be, all passes away like “the morning cloud, or the early dew,” or the rushing stream which the rains have swollen. Were a man to erect a manufactory on such a stream, deceived by its turbid waters and rapid flow, he would find himself sadly mistaken. And as much may they, who build their churches on temporary excitement.

I say, therefore, that the great question for

the philosopher, the philanthropist, the christian to ask, is still behind, and it is this : Do these Revivals do any good ? or at least, any sufficient good to overbalance the unquestionable evils that follow in their train ? Excitement about religion is not religion : though no error has been more common and universal in the world than to mistake it for religion. It is, nevertheless, to be submitted to the test of expediency, just as much as any institution, form, plan, mode of preaching, or in short, any other mode of religious influence. If a man says, "it is true, I should not like so much excitement in any thing else, but this is not an ordinary case ; the salvation of souls is at stake ; the work of God is not to be measured by human maxims ; the great day of his power has come among us and is not to be judged by the light that has shone upon other and former days :"—I say, if any man reasons, or rather, presumes this, you see that he goes blindfold into the whole subject, and falls at once, as if it were self-evident, upon the

very thing he should *find* to be true, after a full and laborious examination.

And yet I suspect that this is the way of thinking with twenty-nine out of thirty, of all the people you will meet here. I had an instance of it only yesterday. I got into the stage-coach, that leaves B—— at four o'clock in the morning, and as we were passing through one of the neighboring villages at sunrise, I perceived a company of people leaving a small building by the road, which I took to be a school-house. As I had never seen any thing of this sort before, I asked a fellow passenger, whether this was one of the religious meetings I had often heard of? He replied that it was, and added, that there was a great Revival in this place.

As one can talk pretty freely under an incognito, and, as I am sometimes ready to force a conversation, to help off the tedium of a ride in the coach, I ventured to say—"You seem to be a very strange people in this country; you are certainly a very sober and consider-

ate people; you are not half as excitable, at least, not in your social character, as the French or Italians; I see nothing like their eager conversation and violent gesticulation among your men of business; you go calmly and rationally at work, I see, in prosecuting all the great interests of society—if you would make the people intelligent, I observe that you build school-houses and hire teachers, and send the children to be instructed,—and so, if you would build up your free and excellent government, you certainly do not think it best to do so, by great political commotions:—how is it, then, that you have these great excitements in religion! How is it that you, who do every thing else by *calculation*, trust this to passion!”

As the person I addressed, was about to answer me, and as I thought sensibly, from the expression of countenance with which he heard me, a solemn and guttural voice arose behind me, as deep as if it had come from a cavern, instead of the back seat of a stage-

coach, and on quite a different moral note, as you will perceive, from that which I was waiting to hear : “ My friend,” said the speaker, “ you are a stranger, I perceive, in this country : I hope you are not a stranger also, to the grace of God.”

“ Why, that,” I replied, “ would depend on what you mean by the grace of God. But not to agitate a question so personal,” said I, “ if you will excuse me—how do you defend so much excitement in religion, when doubtless you would not recommend it, in any thing else. I should suppose, that religion would be a subject for the greater calmness and sobriety.”

“ Ah ! sir,” rejoined he, in the same measured and sepulchral tone, “ the cases are very different. If your neighbor’s house were on fire, you would be *in haste* to save his property, or to extricate his family from danger. If the city we have just left, were about to be invaded, there would be a hurrying to and fro, an unwonted commotion, an anxiety and

dread among the inhabitants: in cases like these there would be an excitement. But sinful men are in tenfold greater danger than the occupants of a burning house, or of a besieged city. And when"—he proceeded with increasing animation—"when the Lord lifts up a standard to the people, as clear as the vision of Constantine, is it strange that they should be struck with wonder and awe? When he makes bare his arm for their escape and salvation, shall they not be transported with gratitude and rejoicing? And this," said he triumphantly, "this is a religious excitement."

"You have certainly a right," was my reply, "to choose your own illustrations; but still you will allow, that they are not arguments. Admit, that sinful men *are* in the danger you state, and *I* believe it is far *greater* than your comparison would imply, though it may not be so imminent, yet, after all, there would be a fair question about the best method of delivering them. You can easily conceive in

the cases you have stated, that men may be so eager, so much excited, as not to act with the proper order, nor with the fullest vigor and effect :—so mad with zeal, as I have often seen them at a great conflagration, that they will do the most unreasonable things in the world. Now why should it be thought that men, in such a state of mind, are so particularly wise, or safe, or well guided? You, surely, will not say that men's being thrown into a great excitement, is of itself a proof that they are *divinely* guided or influenced.* That would be a heathen, rather than a christian sentiment. The ancient pagans did, indeed, mistake phrensy for inspiration, but he would do little credit to the sober instructions of our Sa'our, who should verge towards a similar error. In short, sir, this is the question, I would ask ;—need a man be any less rational, is he to be supposed any less rational, because he is under a divine influence?

* Nevertheless this is the great error of the Revivalists.—*Amer. Ed.*

Might we not say rather that this would make him more so?—that a divine influence would strengthen his reason and all his intellectual powers, instead of enfeebling them? Why then should a man proceed any less rationally or any otherwise, in the work of religion, than he does in the business of education, or in discharging the duties of good citizenship? He is, it is true, dependent on God, and God's power, I hold, instead of being confined to religion, extends to every thing. Not a spire of grass can grow without it. And, now, because this is true, because the instant and ever-working power of God, is in every field around us, would you have men, instead of going regularly and soberly about the work of cultivating the soil,—would you have them assemble in crowds, and assail, first one field and then another, with axes, and ploughs, and harrows, and turn the peaceful culture of the earth, into a scene of tumult, and noise, and confusion? Excitement," I added, "seems to me to savor of what is human : it is man's

work. But the work of God, as it is in every thing else, so I should expect it to be in religion, marked with simplicity, order, and calmness."

"I see, sir," said he, "that we can never think alike upon these matters. You have no apprehension, I am afraid,"—for this is the monitory, not to say, minatory style in which a thorough-paced Revival man always talks—"you have no apprehension, I am afraid, of the utterly depraved state of human nature, and of the great work that is to be done for it. You seem to think that religion is to grow up in the soul, just like the vilest weed that springs from the earth."

"No, sir, I beg your pardon," I rejoined, "not like the vilest weed, but like the healthful corn; and if I recollect rightly, I read such a comparison as this—'first the blade, then the ear, then, the ripe corn, in the ear.' Now, sir, it seems to me, that the promoters of Revivals cannot wait for this process, but would bring the corn to its full growth in a single day."

“It is in vain to talk,” said he, “but I must observe in your own words, that illustrations are not arguments.”

“But *my* illustration, I may beg you to observe,” said I, “is founded on my argument.”

He deigned me no reply, but wrapped his cloak about him, with a manner, which was as much as to say, (not exactly in the words of our English law,) “my cloak is my castle;” and we both, I suppose, resigned ourselves to our meditations. Those of my solemn friend, I presume, turned upon the new instance which I had furnished him, of the depravity and deceitfulness of human nature. Mine you shall have.

The great mischief of these Revivals is, that every thing is distorted by them, into an extravagant and unnatural shape and posture. I find, in fact, a new religion here. The wholesome doctrines of the fathers of our church, the sober spirit of Taylor, and Hoadly, and Paley, would no more do for these people, than the coldest speculations of heathen

philosophy. Religion, instead of being regarded as the general habit and whole character of the mind, is a paroxysm, and a peculiarity in the mind. It is a peculiarity, I repeat, something like a distinct sense, something novel, singular, and almost marvellous. Religion, you and I believe, is a man's self, made holy, pure and excellent. This certainly is the christian doctrine. But there seems to have grown up among these excitements, and grown *out* of them very naturally as I think, an idea akin to that of the old pagan philosophy, that religion is some divine *afflatus*—breathed into the mind—having nothing in common with it—existing independently and alone—not incorporated with the mind and dwelling in the most intimate friendship with it, but maintained within it, as an abstract principle or ethereal essence, by a foreign and preternatural influence ; or, to use the language of the philosophy, by influxes from the fountain of light.

And hence religion, being so regarded, is

always treated as a stranger. If you were to go into a place where one of the Revivals had recently prevailed, you would observe that it had infected the very manners, and given an air to the very countenance, of society. This would especially appear when any reference was made to the strange guest, that had come in among them. You would perceive at once that you was introduced to the company of the *initiated*. You would immediately be put to the question—for the *initiated* cannot rest, till they know whether you are one of them—"Had you passed through this change? Had you got religion?" If you had not, an air of mystery would hang about all their intercourse with you. There would be no ease, no freedom; at least not in the good sense—there might be *freedoms* of a very offensive kind. If, on the other hand, you *were* one of them, you would be treated differently, indeed, but just as singularly. You would, then, be entitled to all the signs and pass-words of this freemasonry of religious experience.

In short, religion, with these people, is an extraordinary thing, obtained, and to be exhibited in an extraordinary manner. He who has got it feels strangely. He who talks about it feels strangely. And *I* can testify, that he to whom the conversation is addressed, often feels strangely too.

The notions of *conversion* which prevail here, and which are fostered by these excitements, particularly illustrate this tendency of them, to place every thing in an unnatural and irrational light. The idea here is, that men are converted and made Christians in one moment—that grace descends not like the calm and refreshing dew, slowly developing the growth of nature, but like the lightning, sudden irresistible, and *blasting every thing natural*. And that which they so much covet *does*, indeed, seem to blast all natural good sense. For how, with one relict of sense, can men talk about getting religion in an hour or a moment. A curious instance occurred to me, a few days ago. I sent my servant to a tailor

to ask why a coat, I had ordered, was not brought to me, and the answer was, that "the principal workman had got religion that morning, and could not finish it."

I could not help reflecting on it. Just compare religion with other things. Certainly, it is an acquisition as difficult as any other—as difficult as any habit or attainment of the intellect, for instance. Now what would be thought of it, if it were gravely stated, that a man had got knowledge, or intelligence, or a philosophic habit of mind, on a certain morning? Comparisons, like these, test, at once, the fallacy and absurdity of these notions.

But comparisons aside—look at the thing itself. Call religion by any other name, let it no longer be this mystical peculiarity, but a broad and rational principle—call it for instance, goodness, or virtue, or devotion, and how impossible would it be, to talk of getting devotion, or virtue or goodness, on a given day or hour? Or, take religion to pieces—resolve this complex thing into its parts, and who could talk of getting benevolence, or patience, or

humility, on a certain morning—much more of getting them all together?

This idea, nevertheless, of an instant conversion, goes deeply and intrinsically into the very principles of a Revival. Without this idea, it could not go on, nor exist, a single day. Let it only be said that the work of religion is the work of life, that all a man can do in a single moment is to resolve to be religious, and that future days, and years must test the strength of his resolve; let it be said that he cannot be pardoned, and assured of heaven, all at once, but only, and in proportion, as he is purified;—and there could be no extravagance nor transport. Men would be sober. It would be a time of thoughtfulness, and self-distrust, and prayer, rather than of unnatural excitement, and mistimed confidence.)

I am willing to allow, that he who makes this resolve, may feel joy in it—and that when new objects, especially such as those of piety, are opened to the mind, they may justly

excite it: but all this is very different from the visionary transport and fallacious confidence of these new converts, who sing songs of triumph long before they have gained the victory, who boast themselves as those who put off the harness, when they are only putting it on.

Indeed, I am inclined to think, that these modern excitements are responsible for the whole of this mischievous notion of sudden conversion. It is a modern doctrine, I suspect, even of the history of modern Orthodoxy. The fathers of Revivals, Whitfield and Wesley, and Tennant and Davenport, have given at least its *prominence*, to this dogma of wild fanaticism. The fathers of *our* church, certainly know nothing about it. And according to my recollection of the dissenters, of Baxter, Doddridge, &c. they are not responsible for it. And as to Calvin, he says expressly, speaking of repentance or regeneration, which he states to have, in his use of the words, the same meaning—"regeneration," he says,

“is not accomplished in a single moment, or day, or year ; but by continual, and sometimes even tardy advances, the Lord destroys the carnal corruptions of his chosen, purifies them from all pollution, and consecrates them as temples to himself ; renewing all their senses to real purity, that they may employ their whole life in the exercise of repentance, and know, that this warfare will be terminated only by death.” If, in the abundance of your candor, you should question the fairness of this, and observe that Calvin seems to be speaking of the whole process of sanctification, I can only reply that he *says*, he is speaking of regeneration or repentance. And he adds that “ God assigns to believers the race of repentance to run, during their whole life.” All this, is a way of speaking about regeneration of which I assure you, you would not hear much among the metaphysical doctors, to whom of late I have been listening. And this, as I think, I might show, from the earlier Calvinistic writers, was the old way—the old *way*, I aver,

though some occasional expressions of a different complexion might no doubt be quoted from them.

But nothing could be quoted that approaches to the "new light" which in this new world has been thrown upon theology—which teaches that a man may "obtain religion," not in a year, or a day, but in a much briefer space—in a moment;—that in the grand modern improvements of spiritual machinery, the work may be far more easily as well as expeditiously done, than of old,—that in fine, the vilest sinner upon earth may, in an instant, be fitted for heaven.

I suppose, the happy votaries of this new light would reflect upon the old Calvinists, pretty much as Matthias Flacius of Illyria, (who wrote in the 16th century) does upon their Apostolic Fathers—and especially upon Jerome and Eusebius, whom he mentions. He complains that after all their skill in languages and philosophy, they were "ignorant of the human disease and of Christ the physi-

cian"—that they give "a very low and imperfect description of a Christian, making him only a man, who by the knowledge of Christ and his doctrine, is brought to the worship of the one true God, and the practice of sobriety, righteousness, patience, and other virtues. But not a word about regeneration and imputed righteousness." "Poor, ignorant, primitive Christians!" exclaims Lardner, "I wonder how they could find the way to heaven! They lived near the times of Christ and his apostles. They highly valued, and diligently read the holy Scriptures, and some wrote commentaries upon them, and yet it seems, they knew little or nothing of their religion, though they embraced and professed it, with the manifest hazard of all earthly good things, and many of them laid down their lives rather than renounce it."

I confess, I have wished some of these modern lights of the new world, would know something about languages, too, as well as the ancients, or else, that they would tell what

they do know. I have heard these preachers again and again, address the people in this manner. "My brethren, examine and judge for yourselves. Ponder the language which is used to describe the conversion of a sinner. He is 'new created,' he is 'born again.' Is not this strong language? Must it not, I ask you, mean a great deal? Is there not a given moment, when a human being is born? Must not the change, therefore, which is indicated by this language be instantaneous? And must it not be immense?" They seem never to have read so standard a theological writer as Lightfoot, who tells us that this language among the Jews, from whom it is derived, was always used to describe a proselyte; that a Gentile who embraced the Jewish religion was always called, "one born again," "a new born child," so highly did they conceive of this distinction. And the Romans, too, of a contemporaneous period, as he tells us, used to say of a man freed from servitude and introduced to the privileges of citizenship, that

he was "born again."—If these teachers of the people would explain the matter thus, they would find themselves stript of their strong argument. Proselytism *was* a sudden event. Any change of a religious ritual or system, so far as it is publicly exhibited, must be sudden. So doubtless was this part of the christian conversion. But the other part, the moral, the spiritual change, which, no question, was likewise required, instead of being sudden, was, and is, and for ever must be, the *slowest of all processes*. The Roman slave could be freed on a given day—but so cannot the slave of sin.

But I have wandered, I scarcely know whither, and I gladly quit modern folly and ancient wisdom, too, to subscribe myself,

Most affectionately yours,

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LETTER VI.

THE NEW LEBANON CONVENTION, AS ILLUSTRATING THE RELIGION OF REVIVALS.

—————, SEPT. 4th, 1827.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I MIGHT have spared myself the remarks with which I began my last letter to you, and which I have made in some others of my letters, to the same purpose ;—for since writing them, a document, fully authorized to speak on this point, has fallen under my eye, in which the ground I have there taken, is entirely conceded. This is the Report or Doings of a Convention of the Clergy at New Lebanon, in the State of New York, assembled to settle some difficulties and differences of opinion that have sprung up, in regard to the proper methods of promoting the Revivals.

I might here remark that I have, in these Letters, presented Revivals to you under

their mildest form, as they exist in the portion of country from which I write. But it seems that some, who had taken this fire from the paternal altars of New England, and carried it to the settlements of the West, have found it more dangerous, among the more combustible materials, and wooded tracts of the "new country." In short, there were great excesses, and the leaders of Revivals in the East, thought it necessary to protest against them. This caused a schism between the East and the West ;—for the children were by no means ready to submit to the parental rebuke,—having *their* marvellous works to show as well as their Fathers. Indeed, the Fathers might have known from their own experience, I suspect, that the last thing to make men question the validity and excellence of their own doings, the last thing to make them *confess* and *submit*, is "a Revival of religion."

A meeting of the parties was, therefore, convened to deliberate upon the matters in

dispute, and one of the earliest resolutions was to this effect, that *Revivals of religion may be attended with so much evil, as to overbalance the good they do.*

Now, this, certainly, is very moderate and reasonable. Nay, it is all that the most arrant skeptic about Revivals, can desire. Revivals, then, are not necessarily a work of God. I am glad that this point is thus formally conceded, and that reason and reflection may hereafter be admitted to have something to do with these things; for surely nothing ever more needed their light. In common consistency, these gentlemen must no longer brand with the title of the "enemy,"* every one who calls in question their Revivals. If they find fault with each other, they must not complain if others find fault with them. Unless, indeed, they propose to monopolize all the religious fault-finding in the country.

This Convention furnishes so conspicuous

* Do they mean, by this title, the '*Evil one*?'

Am. Ed.

a theatre for that kind of observation which I am daily practising in this country, that I must not pass it without some further notice. It falls in also with the immediate object of my letters to you. For it presents a striking specimen of what is too often the Revival spirit,—*much praying, and much dissension and wrath.* I speak of praying, and “I name it, filled with awe”—but alas ! this word includes all sorts of supplication, from that of the humble publican to that of the proud and scornful pharisee. But to proceed : in the first place, the Convention passes a vote, “to request those of their brethren who are in the place,” *i. e.* the good laboring people in the township of Lebanon,—for I suppose they did not mean to request themselves to pray for themselves—to intermit their harvest labors, or at least, “to spend as much of their time as may be convenient in special prayer for the divine blessing on the proceedings of this meeting.”* Then we

* The supposition here made, does credit to the writer's candor, but I think he is mistaken. The vote I should say, is a vote of the Convention, that itself, its

are told a great deal about the prayers of the Convention in every part of their Report. It seems as if they thought, the command had been, "when thou prayest, go upon the house-top, or publish it in the newspaper." It is minutely stated, in every day's Report, that the Convention prayed morning and evening, and the public is informed of "seasons of prayer, interspersed with singing," and how, when the discussion waxed warm, more than once the Convention "united in a season of prayer."

But under this cloud of incense,—which so much pains is taken to render conspicuous—things are going on of quite a different aspect. You see,—as it is now and then disturbed by what the sailors would call a "flaw"—you see the keen and jealous contest of parties. All the selfish passions, that belong to such a contest, and all the devices

members be much in prayer,—which makes a case of something worse than ostentation, or bad taste. If I am right, the Convention puts a duty, commanded of God, universally binding by the word of Scripture, to VOTE! What if there had been a majority against it?—*Am. Ed.*

of ingenuity have full scope and free play. There is moving, and counter-moving of resolutions, and amendments proposed and withdrawn, and carping at phraseology, and frittering away its meaning, and concealed attack, and parrying by the dexterous sleight of words, as much as ever you saw in the most petty and secular legislation. The following is a specimen of a day's discussion, and *such is the subject!*

‘Mr. E. (one of the Eastern gentlemen,) introduced the following proposition.

“In social meetings of men and women, females are not to pray.” [Something in the style of an edict, our friends —— and —— would think, but *that* does not seem to have been a matter of objection : “females *are not* to pray.”]

‘After some discussion, adjourned to meet tomorrow morning, at 8 o'clock. Concluded with prayer.’

‘Friday, July 20. Met according to adjournment, and opened with prayer.’

‘The consideration of the proposition under discussion yesterday was resumed. After further discussion, united in a season of prayer. Then attended further to the discussion, &c. Concluded with prayer.’

‘Friday afternoon. Met according to adjournment and opened with prayer.’

‘The consideration of the proposition was resumed.’

‘It was moved by Mr. A. (one of the Western Gentlemen) that the further consideration of the proposition be postponed till we have gone into an inquiry into matters of fact.

‘After some discussion, united in a season of prayer.’

[After this, the courage of the West seems to revive ;] and ‘Mr. A. asked and obtained leave to withdraw his motion, for postponement, and it was withdrawn.’

[The question is then further discussed, is taken, and the convention is equally divided.]
Next,

‘It was moved by Mr. F. (of the West) that the following question be answered, to wit ; “Is it right for a woman in any case, to pray in the presence of men ? ”’

[This question looks rather Socratic and dangerous, and the eastern men seem to take the alarm—] and ‘after some discussion, it was moved by Mr. E. that the further consideration of this question be indefinitely postponed. The motion was seconded, and after some discussion, Mr. E. asked and obtained leave to withdraw his motion, and it was withdrawn.’

[The next step is to introduce “the following proposition” from the West.] “There may be circumstances in which it may be proper for a female to pray in the presence of men.”

‘The question was taken,’ and eight are for it and ten are against it : so it is decided, in this conclave, that a female may never pray when men are present, let the case be what it will.

“Adjourned, &c.—Concluded with prayer.” Such is one day’s labor of this “Important convention.” The next day was chiefly taken up with the question, whether it is proper “to call persons by *name* in prayer?”

You are to understand that these practices and some others prevailing in the West, had given great umbrage to the East. The three or four first days of the convention are occupied with propositions from the eastern gentlemen, which reflect severely, sometimes by innuendo and sometimes openly, on these practices. The western gentlemen of course wince under these propositions, and strive by every means to ward off the attacks, or to push aside the more covert implications. But after a while, *their* turn comes, and, then, they hurl back implication and innuendo. For whereas, the Eastern men had said, in one of their propositions, “there may be so much infirmity and indiscretion and wickedness of man, in conducting a Revival” as “to render the general evils greater than the local

and temporary advantages"—their Western Brethren amiably retort, in the following proposition, to wit: "attempts to remedy evils existing in revivals of religion, may, through the infirmity and indiscretion and wickedness of men, do more injury and ruin more souls, than those evils which such attempts are intended to correct." That is to say, 'you have accused us, by implication, of "infirmity, indiscretion and wickedness," and now we make the same agreeable charges against you. You have interfered with our proceedings, denominating them weak, indiscreet and wicked; we term your interference so.'

"But how do the *people* regard these strifes and recriminations of their Ministers?" you will say. "Do they look with complacency upon this Convention? Does the cloud of incense hide and keep out of sight the struggle, and the whetted instruments, and the 'disjecta membra,' that are beneath it?" Why really I do not know. The Convention boldly sends out this account of their dis-

putes, bare and naked as a skeleton—(I hear your interjectional comment on the *publication*, as more strange even than the *proceedings*)—nevertheless this they do ; they *publish* with as little hesitation, as if they were doing the wisest thing in the world ; and it is not for *me* to say, that they do not best know the ground they stand upon. Indeed, I can see no evidence that they have miscalculated their own strength,—or, (that which makes it,) the weakness of the people. Among their parishes I hear no complaint nor question. Their report comes out headed with the title, “ Important Convention ; ” and nobody seems to suspect that the title can have but one meaning !

Nay, I should not wonder, if many of the good, honest people of the land, should think there was the most remarkable unanimity in this body. For there is one device, that I have not yet told you of, in regard to which the convention may lay claim to perfect originality. I challenge your invention to devise

a way in which a deliberative body, consisting of two adverse and determined parties, shall so contrive it as to pass some twelve or twenty votes on the very topics at issue, *without a dissenting voice* ! Why thus it is. Whenever a proposition is brought forward which is extremely unpalatable to one party, i. e. “to the Eastern or the Western party—a proposition which calls forth the most decided judgment, which awakens the strongest feeling of hostility, and every body knows that it does—why then, said party modestly, “DECLINES VOTING :” and so the resolution passes, nem. con. What a delightful harmony, which is not only founded on mutual love,—witness the last resolution which I mentioned—but which is backed by such exemplary diffidence !

However, to be serious, the device is no doubt shallow enough ; and yet I suspect it takes, or else the public has taken its cue from the Convention, and though disliking its proceedings, “*declines voting*,” I very much question, however, whether this last is the true

solution. There is such an air of sanctity spread over this meeting,—its Report is introduced with such commendation of “the spirit of christian tenderness (?) and supplication, which seems, it is said, to have pervaded it,” and which it is “hoped will be diffused through all the congregations,”—the actors themselves have so much reputation as great Revival-men, a reputation making it almost blasphemy to speak against them—and then, so much, I repeat, is said in the minutes about their prayers and seasons of prayer—and those who decline voting on any resolution, though evidently galled by it, still so piously referring themselves to Providence for their refusal,—there is, I say, so much of all this, that, it would not be strange, perhaps, if the real merits of the case were buried under this load of extrinsic and imposing circumstances.

The last feature of these transactions which I just stated, really deserves to be more distinctly noticed ; I mean, the reference to Pro-

vidence. This is made in several cases in a manner which is painful and almost shocking. For instance,—after the severe and recriminatory resolution, which I have before commented on, “those who declined voting”—i. e. the persons attacked, “entered the following as their reason, to wit,—‘as the above does not appear to us to be, in the course of Divine Providence, called for, we therefore decline to act.’” That is to say, the aggressors in this controversy, who had framed sundry propositions, severely reflecting on their Western Brethren, find, when it comes *their* turn to be attacked—attacked, too, on the very points in debate,—they find, I say, that the obnoxious proposition is not “called for, *in the course of Divine Providence,*” and “therefore decline” having any thing to do with it. “Not called for in the course of Divine Providence?” What is a call of Providence, but a call of those circumstances in which men are placed? And did not these as much require an expression of opinions on one side as the other?

Did Providence require these men to vote only when it would gratify their own passions? What were the circumstances? Simply these—that there had been difficulties, differences of opinion about certain matters of general prudence and propriety in the methods of conducting Revivals, and that a number of men professedly assemble together to discuss and settle these very matters. What follows? These very matters are brought forward—propositions are introduced on the very points at issue, and lo! the party disaffected—after having gained its own ends—the party disaffected to these propositions is not “called upon” to do any thing about them! What if the other party had entertained the same extraordinary scruples, when *they* were attacked? They might very easily have done so, if they had anticipated this unprecedented kind of evasion. Why, then, the case would have stood thus. The whole body of the Convention, assembled to decide upon certain subjects, would have sagely discovered, when these very subjects were brought forward, that they were

“not called for in the course of Divine Providence ! !” See, too, what a clever inference would follow. “You had rather a stormy time at the Convention,” I might say to one of its members. “Oh ! no ; a very harmonious time,” he might answer. “But I observe contradictory and even recriminatory propositions in your minutes.” “Oh yes ; there were some such brought forward by the opposite party but we considered them as not called for,—we voted them out of the Convention—the Convention as a body had nothing to do with them.” Did the non-voting majority mean that the latter part of this inference should be derived from the course they pursued ? or did they mean nothing ?

But the subject is too grave for satire, and too plain for elucidation. Let the matter, at issue, be what it may, let the right or the wrong, in the general question, be where it will, there can be, with reflecting men, but one opinion, as to the extreme impropriety, to use no harsher word, of sheltering the feelings of

personal mortification or anger, under a solemn reference to the counsels of the Almighty Governor of the universe !

After all, you will ask, what has the Convention accomplished? The answer is, nothing. Its members might as well have stayed at home. They would have done just as much, and decided just as much, by throwing missives from a distance, as by coming to close action. For what have they done? They have framed a number of propositions so extremely general that scarcely any body could object to them, and about which every body knew beforehand that *they* did not differ, and then they have brought forward a number of other propositions to which the two parties alternately listened in a silence, which, if it were not politic, would fairly be construed as sullen, and which may have been both. The very expense of thus gathering a convention from a range of country four hundred miles in extent, ought, though an inferior consideration, to have some weight in estimating its

conduct; the more especially as, I suppose, the persons invited went not “to war on their own charges,” but were provided for, by contribution from their churches—from those very churches, who are perpetually exhorted to give the last farthing they can spare, to the missions, and who have thus been subjected to an expense, that would, in some of the stations, have supported a missionary for three years. If, indeed, the ministers had frankly come forward to their churches, and said, “Brethren, we regret to tell you, that we have accomplished nothing, that we cannot agree about these matters, that we are just as far apart as ever”—then, I will allow that the reflections I have made would be severe. But instead of this, they come forward, with all the apparent confidence of men who have done well, and they would doubtless take it very ill, if their Churches thought otherwise. Their Periodicals and Newspapers sing “*laudamus*,” and would have “*THE ENEMY know*,” that if he speaks a word of censure, he does

it at the peril of their high displeasure. By 'the enemy,' of course they mean all good Christians who stand aloof from their Revivals, and especially, *our Church*, which I am happy to find is the refuge of a great many intelligent people here, who cannot bear the excesses of the popular religion.

However, the good people here may take heart, for if the Convention threatens *them*, or calls them by hard names, that is not half so bad as what they do towards one another. Among *themselves*, there is actual war; their whole report bristles with hostile propositions; their whole proceedings remind you of nothing but *storming* and *mining*; and when every other resort fails, they arm themselves with prayers. For it is observable that the Convention almost always goes to prayer, when dissension is at the highest. I was struck with observing for instance, that their extraordinary "seasons of prayer" were never so frequent as on the day when the question was whether "a female might pray

in the presence of men." This certainly was no great moral inquiry on which men might feel a need of divine direction. The explanation doubtless is, that this was a *little* question of *great* temporary interest :—and of what sort of interest, the general character of their proceedings sufficiently well shows.

It would seem in fact, as if the Convention felt it dangerous at length to go upon disputed ground, and the first part of their report accordingly dwindles away into some of the most extraordinary moral truisms that, I imagine, ever engaged the deliberations of a grave assembly. The Convention can agree upon nothing but such propositions as these, that,

"Language adapted to irritate,"—is wrong : it was high time to judge so ;—that,

"All irreverent familiarity with God, such as men use towards their equals"—is improper:—

That, "To depreciate the value of education"—is not well :—that,

"To state things which are not true, for the purpose of awakening sinners," is a bad thing. Again,

“The immediate success of any measure, without regard to its scriptural character” i. e. without regard to its rectitude, “does not justify it.”

“No measures are to be adopted for promoting revivals, which those who adopt them, are unwilling to have published.”

If propositions like these, need to be so solemnly laid down, what must be the inference? What must be the state of things, and what the tone of morality, when a Convention of the clergy, who have “compassed sea and land,” hill-country and champagne, four hundred miles over, sit gravely down, and solemnly vote, that dark intrigues, unconscionable expedients, angry speeches, lying, and impiety, are bad things, and wrong? What would be thought of the state of society, where a company of merchants should get together, and pass formal resolutions, declaring that fraud, cheating, and falsehood were wrong, and ought not to have countenance? This Convention for supporting and defending Revivals, could not possibly have framed a

severer *satire* upon Revivals than they have done !

But enough, and enough. I have dwelt thus long on this Convention, though the only concern I have with it, is to depict to you the state of religion in this country, and particularly the effects of the great religious excitements of which I have taken so much pains to give you an account. You may depend upon it, they are not to be desired among the Evangelical body of our church, to which you are attached, and which, though I do not agree with it in all respects, I allow to be so worthily seeking out the means of promoting a more fervent and earnest religion, in England.

I cannot help adding that the account I have been giving you, furnishes strong corroboration of a remark which I made in my last letter, that these religious excitements communicate *an unnatural character to religion*, and tend to widen the separation, which has always so much prevailed, between religion

and all the ordinary principles of human reasoning and conduct. It is because this was a *religious* Convention, and a Convention of Revival-men, that it escapes the ordinary sagacity of the people here. Only suppose the same things to have taken place in a purely secular assembly, and you see at once how differently it would have been regarded. Suppose, for instance, that in the late change of the ministry, in our country, the different portions of the liberal party, those who took office and, those who for various reason would not, had met together, and tried for an amalgamation—suppose that after some grave and general propositions about politics, they had come to the points at issue; then imagine discordant propositions, concealed attacks, blunt recriminations, the *forbearance* of those who “decline voting,” and the imposing reference to Providence—suppose it all in short, and suppose it all *published*, as a specimen of the tender and harmonious deliberations of these men,—and, I

am sure that the prayers of the whole bench of Bishops attending, could not have made the people of England tie up their tongues as they do here, and look a solemn assent to such proceedings.

This is one of the great evils that still clings to the religion of the whole world. It is not brought down to those principles of common sense, by which men judge of other things. It is not brought into free contact with the mind. There is a mystery and a spell attending it, even till now. And never till it is disenchanted, never till it comes to dwell in the freedom of our minds and the simplicity of our affections, never till we learn to commune with it, as the companion and friend of our bosoms, shall we experience its full power, or perceive its transcendant glory ! I feel that I wish *much* for you and myself, when, I say—that it may thus come to *us*, is the prayer of your affectionate friend,

LETTER VII.

THE RELIGION OF REVIVALS,—CONTINUED.

_____, SEPTEMBER 13th, 1827.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I AM in haste to finish with what the good Bishop calls this “transatlantic madness,” and shall try to bring within the compass of a single letter, what farther I have to say upon it.

The *extraordinary* and *novel* character of this religion is what, continually and every day more strongly, presents itself to my reflections.

I have been accustomed to think of the course of a good and pious man, as a regular progress. No description has seemed to me more beautiful or true, than that of the inspired penman, when he says, that “the path of the just is as the shining light, shining brighter and brighter unto the perfect day.” But here I find a religion of fluctuation. Its

progress is not like that of the steady and majestic luminaries of heaven, but rather like the erratic and glaring comet, now heated and blazing, in its approach to the sun, and, then, after having spread trouble and perplexity among the nations, retiring from our sight, to its long and cold wanderings from the fountain of heat and light.

I had thought, too, that religion was calm and tranquil,—that it was designed to control the impulses of passion and to hush and sooth the troubled and agitated spirits of men. But here is a religion of tumult and excitement. I perceive, indeed, that the leaders, of late, are striving to suppress all *outward* marks of agitation, and are anxious to state, as often as possible, that “the work is *remarkably* calm.” But this very little alters the real state of things. The *inward* commotion still exists, and means are constantly used to make it about as strong as the reason can bear. In some melancholy instances, it is stronger. The great effort to keep down

the outward demonstrations, only betrays a consciousness, that the agitation is deep within, that the soul is shaken to its very foundations. It is to no purpose, to say, that the victim is calm, when he is on the rack. It avails nothing, at least, in *defence* of the torture, to say that he is calm. It proves the strength of his fortitude, not the lightness of his sufferings. And that the object still is,—notwithstanding all *appearances* and disclamations—that the object still is, to create the deepest *internal* agitation, is evident from the fact, that the appeals are chiefly addressed to the most excitable passions, that they are mostly adapted to plunge the mind into despondency, gloom, and terror, as to raise it to unwonted animation and rapture.

The publicity, too, of all this, is another thing that contradicts all the ideas I had formed of religion. I had felt especially, as if religious *anxieties* naturally shrunk from notice. To bury them in the heart, or to bear them to the altar of private devotion, or, at

most, to unfold them in private and intimate intercourse with a friend,—this has seemed to me as a kind of law for feelings so sacred. You and I know, my dear friend, how sacred and comforting is such an intercourse. But here, all this appears to be done in public; nay, it is actually done in public meetings. People are actually questioned concerning their most secret and delicate feelings *in a crowd*, and it is considered a mark of pride or obduracy, to decline so open a disclosure. It is a kind of *monitorial* system of religious instruction. Lay members are deputed to act as monitors, and they go around from seat to seat, putting all indiscriminately to the question, and offering their advice and guidance. This illustration is perfectly just, as applied to what are called *conferences*, (which are large and promiscuous assemblages of people) and it certainly presents but an unfavorable view of this system of religious instruction. For I believe it is conceded, that even in common education, the monito-

rial system, especially in the hands of ordinary pupils, is but a grosser and more mechanical way of doing that, which were much better done by a single skilful instructor. It is a quicker and cheaper process, and is often attended with more noise and show than real utility. The comparison, I fear, is but too exact in many particulars.

All these unnatural and untoward features of religion, you must know, too, are wrought into the very system of Revivals. They are not mere appendages, but essential parts of the system.

And it is another, and not the least evil of this system, that it *engrosses* the mind,—taking precedence, if not place, of every thing else in religion. Revivals are the great things, the great objects of desire, the great epochs in the moral history of society. Nay, in the limited apprehension of their votaries, they fill the mighty space, to be occupied by the eternal and infinite themes of religion itself. Men's ideas of this glorious concern

seem to be circumscribed by the little and tumultuous scene, in which they are engaged. The vast and comprehensive system of means and influences which God has ordained, the decent ordinances of piety, the Sabbath stillness, the calm and gentle voices of nature, the solemn teachings of providence and life, the all pervading power of conscience, the all pervading and ever working spirit of the Almighty—these drop out of sight, and all seems to be girdled in, by the walls of the conference-room. I have heard many prayers in such circumstances, which seemed not to go beyond the dome of the tabernacle, where they were offered. God was addressed so familiarly, so much as if his whole mind and counsel were employed upon that one Revival, and that one assembly, so much, too, as if, even in that limited circle of his regard, he were a capricious being, that he seemed to be worshipped as *a deity of the place and occasion*, rather than the Universal Father—as a God

of Revivals, but not, I must be pardoned feeling, as the God of the Universe.

I have heard many prayers, which were in a strain like this. "Lord, have mercy upon sinners in this assembly. We are afraid they will never have another opportunity. We are afraid they have gone too far already. But if thou canst come over the mountain of their transgressions, if thy patience is not clean gone for ever, we pray that thou wouldst open the arms of thy mercy to them *this once*. Not for their sakes, but for thine own great name's sake, pardon them. Glorify thy power, and get to thyself a great name, in overcoming their opposition. We leave them in thy hands. But we pray, if it be consistent with thy glory, that thou wouldst have mercy upon them." As I have gone out from such a meeting, beneath the open sky, and lifted my eyes to the calm and boundless heavens, I have said with myself, is it to the God of all these worlds, that I have heard men pray this evening? As I have gone on,

meditating upon what Jesus Christ has taught me concerning this gracious, sovereign, and infinite Being, I have exclaimed, is it to this universal Father, that these men have prayed?

I always think, in such circumstances, of an observation of our admirable Paley. I cannot give you the language, as I am not able at this moment to refer to the passage. But it is to this effect. Whenever, says he, I witness the zeal of the Methodists, and observe the excitement that attends their meetings, feeling as I do, the infinite weight and seriousness of the concerns of religion, I am tempted for a moment to go along with them, but I never can help exclaiming, on an instant's reflection,—how different is all this, from the sober spirit of our Saviour, from the calm, dispassionate and rational manner of his teaching! It seems to me, as if every reflecting man, who witnesses one of these Revivals would make the same comment. It

should be considered, moreover, that our Saviour was placed in circumstances which would seem to justify him in the attempt to arouse the public mind by the most exciting and empassioned appeals. He was a Reformer, and he had no share in the sins which he condemned. On these accounts, he is not,—as some of them seem fond of considering him—he is not altogether an example to our modern preachers. They speak not with the same authority, nor with the same conscious innocence in themselves, nor in the same extraordinary and exciting situations. But all this only sets in a still stronger light, the wide contrast between our Saviour's moderation and calmness, and the passionate zeal of those who profess, more nearly than all other men, to follow him.

Yes, more nearly than all other men. This over-weening self-complacency is one of the worst traits in their religion. They hold themselves up to the people, as the only ministers who *preach Christ*, and their meet-

ings as the only services which have the spirit of Christ in them. If a preacher, not of their class, delivers a sermon, teaching that to be a Christian, is "by the knowledge of Christ and his doctrine, to be brought to the worship of one true God, and to the practice of sobriety, righteousness, patience and other virtues," they are as petulant and contemptuous about it, as Flacius Illyricus, whom I before quoted, was, about the early fathers and teachers. They pronounce it, "mere cold morality!" and say, more in scorn, I am afraid, than in pity, that "there is nothing of Christ in it." The pity, you will judge, however, they are as little entitled to feel as the scorn.

But what work do you think this spirit will make, when through "the droppings of the sanctuary" it is distilled upon the mass of the people. A man, not much acquainted with religious fanaticism, would be astonished at the presumption and boldness which are thus spread through the lowest classes of society. If you were travelling through this coun-

try, you might hear on every side, people of the least possible title to any such confidence, persons of the most ordinary capacity and no knowledge,—who so far from being fit to judge of high spiritual matters, had not got so far as to “cleanse the outside of the cup and the platter,”—persons who so far from being judges of religious purity and decorum, seemed not to have learnt the morality of washing their faces—you might hear them proudly pronouncing judgment on the purest and best men in the country,—denouncing one, and cutting off another from all hope, and graciously permitting a third to stand till the harvest, admitting with the most solemn and portentous shaking of the head, that he *might* be saved, though it would be “so as by fire.”

And this—to show you that I am not wandering from the subject,—this is the result of those principles of religion which give birth to Revivals. It is because these misguided people are taught to rely on supernatural impulses, because they are puffed up with the

notion of special grace being imparted to them, and giving them a superiority over the natural understanding of other men, that they thus speak of those, to whom, in any other relation, they would not lift their eyes, but with respect and deference. People of humble capacity and acquisitions are not disposed, but as they are influenced by others, to depart so far from the modesty that most truly becomes them. They are not often found deciding so contemptuously on the merits of a distinguished lawyer, or an eminent physician. But when it comes to religion, they are told that the case is altogether different. And those who feel themselves to be ignorant of almost every thing else, are encouraged to pronounce on the profoundest questions in the infinite subject of religion, and on the most delicate and complicated questions in the forbidden subject of their neighbor's heart !

This idea of religion as something preternatural, leads to another and still worse result—a result to which the whole system of Re-

vivals tends. It is, that religion is very much resolved into a set of *passive impressions*. There is enough activity, indeed, in Revivals—enough and too much, such as it is. But it is all designed to prepare the mind to be *operated upon*. Now, if a man should be active in any thing in this world, it certainly is in procuring his own worth, his own virtue, his own piety—in one word, his own happiness. This is the very *law* of happiness, and it is heaven's law, never to be broken. And in so far, as a man trusts to passive impressions, will he certainly be deceived. In fact, I am inclined to believe, that this is the great delusion that attends most of the religious feeling that I see around me. It is not active, not self-wrought, and therefore it is not effectual, not habitual. It dies away, because it has no root in itself. Men get a great impression at one of these Revival meetings, just as they do at a solemn mass, or a sacred concert, or, though the subject of feeling be different, just as they do at the theatre; and the

emotion is, oftentimes, about as valuable in the one case, as the other.....In truth these Revivals are the grand modern drama in religion, and men will act their part and have their day in it, I suppose, as they have done in all the religious dramas, whether Popish or Protestant, that have gone before it. Meanwhile, the real business of religion, like the real business of life, I trust, will go forward. (For, really, if religion consists in any thing, it consists in action—in mental, moral, habitual, daily action.) It is not the business of religion to shut men up to despair and *inaction*; nor to “shove them off”—as a distinguished preacher of Revivals lately said in a sermon —“to shove them off in an open boat, without sail, oar, rudder, or compass.” The business of ministers, he said, was “to get them into the boat, and shove them off, and, then, they were left in despair to the mercy of God.”

This tendency to depress the mind of a people, is a feature in the system of Revivals

that I must not pass entirely over. For although a man may be elated with spiritual pride in reference to the world at large, he may be, none the less, in subjection to a system, and to his Minister. Extremes often meet here, as they do elsewhere. The proudest may be the most cowardly and abject. The most self-sufficient, may be the least independent. At any rate, I am certain that Revivals, here, do more than any thing else to fasten the yoke of religious timidity and subservience on the mass of the people. There never was a people in the world who had less true religious freedom, less true freedom of thought and feeling, than a congregation over whom this brooding *incubus* of a Revival has settled itself heavily down. Every one's religious experience must be broken in, to the prescribed measure and form. Every one is asking, not, in his simple and solitary thoughts, how he *should* feel, but how his neighbor feels. Every one must believe certain things, and do certain things,

and pass through a certain process ; or he is lost. And the things that I here speak of are not the essential things of virtue and devotion, but the technical things of a Revival. I do not say, that all this is arbitrarily imposed by the Minister : it results, in fact, from the very *esprit du corps* of a great religious excitement. "The whole head is sick, and the whole heart is faint" with this one terrific agitation. Above all, no one may hesitate, doubt or oppose, as I have said before, because "it is the work of God." The new convert gets up in the assembly, and says with an awful and preternatural tone and countenance, that he has "felt the power of the Holy Ghost in his soul," and, though he may be one of the weakest and most ignorant persons in the congregation, the whole heart of the people bows down at his words, as if he spoke with the voice of a prophet. I would not say this with any contempt, and I certainly do not with any surprise, for how *can* the people do otherwise, so long as they believe in the su-

pernatural character of what is passing around them? The public mind *must* be enslaved, by such a system. It *ought* to be, if the pretensions of this system can be sustained. If miracles are passing about me, if events are taking place in the dwellings of my neighbors, which cannot be accounted for by any known laws of human nature, I have nothing to do, but to yield up my mind to them, and to yield it up, with fear and trembling. The *legitimate* consequence of superstition is mental servitude.

With this tendency of the system, to take away the proper activity and freedom of the mind, I must connect the unfriendly bearing it has on a pure and elevated morality. I hear, indeed, of instances in which men are reclaimed from the grosser vices,—and I am told, too, of cases where an opposite result is produced. And it would not be strange, I think, if in that total unhinging of the mind which is often produced by these excesses, the flood-gates of morality should be borne

away by the torrent of religious excitement. Excitement of itself is always dangerous; and some of the circumstances of this are particularly so. This being constantly abroad, and in a crowd—and the evening-meetings especially, which, night after night, draw servants and young people from their homes, must have a tendency to unsettle the mind, and to give it a distaste for the strictness and sobriety of every-day duties.

But it is of a higher morality, that I was about to speak—of morality as touching all the relations of men to one another—the morality of kind thoughts, and forbearing words, and charitable judgments, and well governed passions—the morality that requires modesty in the young, sobriety and self-restraint in the ardent and zealous, gentleness among relatives, and peace among neighbors. This, I am afraid, does not flourish much in Revivals. These virtues are apt to fall out of the account among the high and exaggerated objects of religious zeal and excite-

ment. Little or nothing is said of them. The public mind is turned to convictions and conversions, to glooms and raptures, to frames and experiences, to metaphysical processes of feeling, and mysterious dogmas of faith, and while engaged with these, it naturally comes to think very slightly of the gentle and unpretending duties of social and domestic life.

The *Revival conscience*, in fact, (if I may use the expression) has often seemed to me a very different thing from the true, pure, and refined conscience. It takes a different standard, and brings the character to a different test. If a man has attained to a certain extravagant state of feeling, it suffices with many, and they will scarcely think of going beyond to the matters of strict truth-telling and plain-dealing honesty, and a scrupulous care to the temper. Far be it from me, to say that such a neglect of these ordinary and, after all, most difficult virtues, is inculcated or abetted by the teachers; but it

arises, more or less from the very state of things. The mind, under a great excitement, is impelled, and almost assumes to itself the right, to act and judge, upon extraordinary maxims and principles.

Under this influence, too, means for carrying on the Revivals are freely adopted which would scarcely be thought very creditable or correct in any other case. It is just as we witness it often, in a great political excitement. Men will do things, at such a time, which, they would feel, did not comport with a high sense of honor or morality, at any other. The exigency, they say, justifies it. And so, the moral exigency which a Revival presents, is thought to justify extraordinary principles of moral conduct. There are plans and combinations for getting possession of the public mind, or there is management for operating upon an individual mind--there are secret plottings and whisperings, or bold innuendoes, or rumors circulated on slight evidence, or easy inferences that in secret

stab the fairest reputation—and there are cruel and shocking liberties taken with private feeling, from which a man with any high tone of moral delicacy, would revolt, if his moral discrimination were not whelmed in this flood of excitement.

The true conscience—and in this it differs from that of Revivals—is not an empassioned emotion, the offspring of fear, nursed by agitation, and guided by agonies and raptures. It is a sober, calm, severe, self-controlling power, the image of the tranquil and undisturbed Divinity, the development of the moral nature, unfolded by reflection, directed by wisdom, and chastened by a holy caution. It is the fearing to offend, not the fearing to suffer. It is this last feeling that awakens so much excitement; the former does not. And I am apt to think that conscience holds but an insecure position amidst the stirring of the passions. Even remorse, which is conscience putting forth its utmost power—even remorse is terribly calm.

There never was a teacher that dealt so closely with the conscience as Jesus Christ ; and yet there never was a teacher so devoid of passion, so devoid, I might say, of fervor, and of all that the world calls eloquence. Now, who would not feel, that if our Saviour had adopted the Revival method of teaching, if he had labored to throw the people into a great and overwhelming agitation, if he had taught them to expect immediate and supernatural impressions from heaven, and to resolve almost the whole of religion into these impressions—who would not feel, I say, that such a course must have been unfavorable to a sober and severe, to a gentle and refined morality. He would have found enough of Jewish pride and caballistic mystery to enlist in his cause—and that, too, without passing through any great change. He would have found Pharisees enough to boast, and Essenes to speculate, and Scribes to expound, and Rabbis to dispute, and a populace ready enough for tumults, but he would scarcely

have found the sober and self-denying, the peaceable and patient disciples of the cross.

I fear, it must be added, that this system is not less unfriendly to intellect than it is to morality. Indeed it is quite obvious that the system is not at all designed to promote intellectual improvement, nor, in fact, to promote religious knowledge. The same set of ideas is repeated over and over, with various illustrations, for months together. The great object is not to enlarge and perfect these ideas, but to impress them. To conduct a Revival requires no range of thought; to experience it, forbids the calmness of inquiry. Men of the least talent and reflection are often the most successful in promoting them, and the most ordinary persons in these scenes, may rise to the highest consequence. The great appeal is made, not to the intellect, but to the imagination and the passions. The ordinary means of mental and social improvement are made to give way before the progress of a Revival. Those who yield to its

influence, can think of nothing else. They cannot *read* any thing like history, or books of general knowledge and literature; they cannot attend a course of philosophical lectures; they cannot join a Mechanic's Institution; they cannot do any thing for the improvement of the mind. Even schools are sometimes broken up, for a season, by these excitements. I was conversing lately with a very intelligent gentleman from the western part of the state of New York, who appeared to talk with the most serious apprehensions for the prospects of society in that quarter. He said that all social improvement was at an end where one of these Revivals came—that people lost their interest in all intellectual pursuits, that the courtesies of life declined apace, that the rudest liberties were taken with private character and feeling; men had less respect for each other, and less respect, even, for the ordinary and established services of religion, and it seemed to him, that if this system should be extended and

consolidated, it would overshadow the moral and social prospects of that whole country. Indeed, if the same zeal was manifested, the same time given, the same number of evenings spent, for the acquisition of knowledge and the general improvement of society, it is easy to see, that the social and intellectual progress of the people would be altogether unexampled. As it is, I presume that no one will pretend, that there is any such progress of the public mind, during one of these seasons of excitement. In fact, the intelligence of the country generally stands aloof from it.

In estimating the effects of religious excitement, it is common, and is indeed a part of the very excitement itself, to *overlook the evil* that it does. The effect upon the converts themselves, questionable as it is, seems to be thought the only thing worth considering. As to those who are passed by and reprobate, they can but be destroyed; the conversion of others, cannot, it is thought, make their destruction any more sure, and

so, their case is very calmly left out of the account. The number of converts, therefore, and the accessions to the churches, engross the whole attention. Statements are continually published, setting forth the experiences of the regenerated, their joys and hopes, and the triumphs of the saints; but you hear nothing, all this while, of the bitterness, the evil speeches, the uncharitable surmises, the jealousies and strifes, that also make up a part of every Revival. A church may be rent asunder or thrown into confusion, a minister may get into contention with the people, and may be burnt out by the very fires which he has kindled—this is not a very uncommon occurrence, I am told—but these things do not come into the account of an Awakening. The statements are always *ex parte* of course, and, therefore, triumphant. We hear of the factitious and mistaken joys of a little company, but we hear nothing of the soured and irritated mind of the public, nothing of the stern and scornful infidelity that is silently

nourished amidst these scenes of erring and extravagant zeal, nothing of the spread, among the people at large, of strange, fanatical, gloomy and repulsive ideas of religion. There is one class of those who are injured that has especially moved my pity. These are the timid, the tender in heart and scrupulous in conscience, who, not having experienced the same illumination as others, conclude that they are forsaken of God, and pass years, and in some cases, their whole after lives, in perpetual dejection and gloom. The triumphal chariot has passed by indeed, with shout and acclamation, but these are left by the way side, to mourn and weep, as if they were unworthy to lift their eyes to behold the procession of the favored and happy.

Let me not be unjust. No doubt, some good is done. The vicious and vile are in some cases reclaimed. There are hard incrustations of habit over some minds, which nothing but blows will break. There is a

deep worldly stupidity, which nothing but a voice of thunder will reach. *Most* men, with the prophet I believe, would be more affected by “the still small voice;” but there are some who want outward tokens—to whom “the fire,” and “the whirlwind,” and “the earthquake” would carry a deeper impression. Many such, I doubt not, in these scenes, begin a better life—begin it, with unfortunate auspices, indeed,—but then, many of them, perhaps, would not otherwise have begun it at all.

It would be too much to demand, that every man’s religion should be just like our own. The less inward reflection there is, the more need exists, I suppose, of outward stimulants to keep up the vigor of piety : and the less refinement there is, the *stronger* must these stimulants be. I have sometimes thought, that for the common people, in retired country villages, who meet with but little to arouse and quicken the mind, where a general stagnation and stupor of mind is the thing most to

be feared, it is not so much amiss that *religion* should come in the form of excitement.

And in the good order of providence, these are the minds, in general,—the less informed and cultivated—that form the *materiel*, out of which Revivals are made. Exceptions there are, of course, to this, as to every general remark. If I would not be unjust to the system, still less would I to the men. The general character of these excitements, as I have stated it to you, is undoubtedly modified, in particular hands. I have met with clergymen, not only of great worth, but of great refinement of mind, who are favorers of the Revivals. I think, indeed, that they are mistaken on this point, but that does not alter their general character. The misfortune is, that their natural good sense and intellectual cultivation, are not suffered to bear, as they ought, upon their notions of religion. They would not think of promoting the general cause of human improvement in any other of its departments—they would not think of promo-

ting common education, or learning, or the political welfare of the people in this way—their sense and good judgment and good taste would revolt at it; but here is the great evil, *religion is a different thing*; here is the strong hold of all the superstition and fanaticism in the world. Take religion out of the hands of common sense, and there is an end to all restraints upon its excesses and errors. Through the same means it is, that learning has been, at one period, scholastic and puerile, a system of grave trifling; and through the same means, despotic governments have always entrenched themselves within the inaccessible barriers of prescription and legitimacy. There have been learned fools, and refined despots, and it is through the same process, that there have been intelligent and accomplished errorists in religion. While, however, it is by such reasonings, that I account for the exceptions above stated, it is quite clear, from fact as well as reasoning, that these gross excitements have free play, only *beneath* the “hori-

zontal line" that divides the mass of society. I am firmly persuaded that among a body of people characterized by a rational faith and a pure and refined taste, one of these Revivals could not proceed a single step. Even supposing the same religious feeling to exist in such minds—as I devoutly wish more of it did exist in them—yet its tendencies would all be Anti-Revivaltendencies. Such persons would retire to their homes, to their closets, to their own hearts : they could not be made to come out and exhibit themselves ; they could not be made to tell their experiences ; they would feel as if it were " casting their pearls before swine."

It is the province of God to bring good out of evil. He causes even the wrath, the folly, the mistakes and extravagance of man to praise him. He brings good out of the convulsions of society, as well as the convulsions of nature. This would be an ill reason, indeed, for desiring these social commotions, or for working them into a system and plan of

moral influence. We *pray* not, for storms and earthquakes ; we stand aloof, if possible ; we shrink and fly from them. As little could I think of praying for great commotions in the religious world. If they came, if they could not be withstood, I should stand aloof from them. If I were obliged, as a believer in Providence, to admit that they are, like tornadoes and earthquakes, the work of God, the results of that wayward nature he has given us, I should still regard them as his "strange work." The chosen path of religion, I should seek for, amidst calmer tokens. I should expect to find in this path, analogies to what is divine in other things. I could not be brought to believe that religion must be at war with every thing else that God has made. I would have it go on, with the goings on of all things around it, blending with nature, blending with life, holding the communion of holy joy or patient trial with all the mercy and discipline of heaven. I would not have the soul shaken and convulsed in order to hasten its great spiritual development.

I would not expect to bring forward the growth of the all-perfect principle of spiritual life, in a day or a week. I would not attempt to force it in a hot-bed, nor do I believe, that it is to be treated as if it were an exotic in the soil of the human heart. I would have it set in its native soil, and nourished with influences, generous and broad as the heaven that spreads above it, and fair and gentle as the earth around it. How beautiful in this connexion are the words of our Wordsworth, when speaking of the devotional influences of that real scene, to which I have just compared the true and noble means and aids of piety.

“ Sound needed none,
Nor any voice of joy ; his spirit drank
The spectacle ; sensation, soul, and form
All melted into him ; they swallowed up
His animal being : in them did he live,
And by them did he live ; they were his life.
In such access of mind, in such high hour
Of visitation from the living God,
Thought was not, in enjoyment it expired.
No thanks he breathed ; he proffered no request ;

Rapt into still communion that transcends
The imperfect offices of prayer and praise,
His mind was a thanksgiving to the power
That made him."

Alas! my friend, how little is there to be seen of that religion which this holiest of our living poets has drawn, with such intimate perception and such lavish beauty upon his manifold page! How little of its true and full development, has the religion of our blessed Saviour yet received among his professed followers! Men seem not to be able to be earnest, without being extravagant, or rational, without being dull. They seem, in fact, scarcely to have conceived of it. Authors write on, and the people read on, as if they had no comprehension of the sublime and beautiful harmonies of christian virtue,—as if they took it for granted, that to be at once solemn and cheerful, strict and liberal, simple and profound, free in thought, and yet bound in conscience, were things totally incompatible. That union of opposite qualities, that mingling in the

mind of all that is lofty, with all that is humble, that severe self-control which springs from conscious and keen susceptibility, that powerful feeling which from its very power is calm, that tranquillity which is touched and rapt, with exquisite religious tenderness—it is all, alas ! beyond the aim and imagination of most good men : it is yet to come. May it come quickly ! It would, indeed, be the coming of Christ in the hearts of men !

May it quickly, and may it fully come ! This would indeed be a Revival of religion. Heaven forbid ! that the *phrase* in its proper sense, should lose any of its interest to my mind. I have indeed many objections to these things ; I have one to the very phrase, as it is here used. The very phrase, Revivals of religion, carries to my mind the idea of but petty concerns and doings, compared with that one sublime revolution, that great REVIVAL of RELIGION, to which I am looking. This, to me, and so far as the world around me is concerned, is the noblest interest and the

grandest hope of life—to see poor, misguided, wayward, wearied human nature, pursuing at last, its true end, and obtaining its true rest—to see these restless and impatient seekers after good, finding that which they seek—to see the poor contented, and the rich temperate, the lowly high-minded, and the lofty humble, and the learned wise, and the votaries of pleasure virtuous, and worldly men devout—to see the mists of error and the shadows of delusion, that have so long hung in dark clouds over the ways of religion, clearing up, and to behold happy multitudes thronging those ways of pleasantness and paths of peace. There is nothing in *this* world to compare with an object so noble and a hope so glorious.

But I am admonished by the length of this letter to close. I look with deep interest upon the great experiment which society, and which Christianity are making in this country, and I may express this interest in some further communications to you. I have thus far,

seized upon only one of the most palpable features in the state of things, this side of the water. There are other topics, of a no less interesting, though of a less extraordinary character.

I shall now, however, rest my pen, and relieve your patience, for a considerable time. But whether writing or not writing, whether present with you, or far removed by the "world of waters," I am ever and most affectionately,

Your friend,

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ERRATA.—Page 6, line 6, for *conversion*, read *conviction*.
Page 76, 12 lines from top, for *of* the history, read *in* the history.
Page 78, 5 lines from the bottom, for *their*, read *the*.



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